Mobile Nepal is hooked on YouTube

With 96% of Nepali households now owning mobile phones, the country is fast reaching phone saturation. Of those with the device, 61.3% have smart phones, and this proportion is expected to spike sharply in coming years. At present only 26% of Nepal’s use the Internet on a daily basis, but as more people upgrade to data phones, and to better connectivity and bandwidth, the online population will grow – with implications for society, politics and the e-commerce economy.

One of the most important shifts in the past two years has been the explosive growth in YouTube use – up from virtually zero in 2018 to 14% last year, and then almost doubling to 60% in this year’s survey. (See graph, right)

The annual Nepal Media Survey is carried out by Sharcast Initiative, and this year involved 4,830 respondents in 48 districts from all seven provinces in January and February.

Comparing data for the past three years allows us to track changes in the spread and popularity of platforms, devices and apps and also to break down data by province, gender, age, ethnicity, education, or income.

“The most striking revelation in this year’s survey is the surging popularity of the YouTube platform,” explains Mahbu Adhaya of Sharcast Initiative.

“The proliferation of new YouTube channels in Nepal is fed by this voracious demand for videos on mobile devices.”

Still, YouTube has a lot of catching up to do, as nearly nine million Nepalis now have Facebook accounts. The survey showed that 88.7% of respondents were on Facebook. But this was only a marginal increase from last year, which may suggest that the platform is maxing out. Answers to a multiple-choice question revealed that 35.8% are also on Messenger and 7% on WhatsApp, both owned by Facebook.

Sharcast disaggregated the data for Facebook to show that there were more men using it (94%) than women (86%), and more unmarried people on it (94%) than married (67%).

The word ‘internet’ is often used synonymously with ‘Facebook’ by Nepalis, and when it comes to the proportion of Facebook users among survey respondents, there is almost no difference between the lowest income bracket (69.5%) and the highest earners (87.9%).

If this is surprising, so is it that more people in rural areas (88.6%) use Facebook than in the city (87.5%). Most Nepal with Facebook accounts are in the 16-44 age group, however the app has a strong user base even among people above 60, (81%) which could have to do with parents’ desires to communicate with grown children studying or working abroad.

There are significant differences in the demographics of Facebook and YouTube users. City-dwellers tend to be on YouTube more (71%) than villagers (60%), and only 25% in the Western province say they watch videos there (possibly because of lack of bandwidth). Perhaps most surprising is that YouTube channels are most popular among people above 60 – it be that older people are clicking on religious programs?

The sustained popularity of the line messenger app is possibly due to the large number of Nepali workers in West Asia. Breaking down the responses shows that nearly twice as many women as men said they used line than did men, and most of these were from poorer families in rural areas.

Among other apps, despite the apparent popularity of TikTok, only 3% of survey respondents said they used it. Perhaps the number of women TikTok users was more than double that of men users, and most were unmarried. Although Twitter posts are quoted often by the mass media, the number of its users are still low (1.3%) and while many city-based startups use Instagram for marketing, only 3% of Nepalis are on the platform.

Kumada Sri Saf

More Survey Results

PAGE 8


Sonia Awale
Associate Editor

Welcome to this 1000th print edition of the Nepali Times weekly that also celebrates the 10 March International Women’s Day. It has been a two-decade long journey during which my predecessors who have transitioned through this newspaper have witnessed history first-hand like the war, the 2001 palace massacre, the royal family’s political coup of 2005, restoration of democracy, a prolonged political transition, the euro crisis, the blockade and finally federal elections in 2017.

The earthquake struck on my first day as an intern at the Nepali Times five years ago. Reporting on the aftermath of the disaster like everything else, left me off the deep end. In 2017, after completing my master’s in digital journalism, I returned to the paper with a focus on covering health, environment and the climate change movement.

Unlike other newspapers, the Nepali Times has a large number of readers. We are not rigid about the content we publish. In 2017, I was involved in the launch of the student edition of the Nepali Times, which has been a huge success, and has increased in reader numbers in the last three years. We have tried to bring the reporting closer to the audience, provide context and reframe the content in an interesting way.

For the past two decades, the Nepali Times newspaper has pursued context and process, rather than simply covering events. This gives the hard copy edition a longer shelf-life, and the archives import research value to Nepali-related topics that will be useful in the future.

Every week, www.nepalitimes.com has more than 100,000 unique visitors, most of whom have bookmarked the homepage and have a habit of clicking on story links on social media. The average reader spends five minutes per page, which is remarkable for an age of short attention spans.

Within the past 26 years, the Nepali Times newspaper has undergone a transformation. The paper has become more reader-friendly and as media becomes faster paced the way that we create, organise and lead the content development is fast changing.

Leaving a large daily for the smaller newspaper of the Nepali Times has been a big change for me. This place is a breath of fresh air. There is a balance here even between the content and being a photojournalist, and the archive import research value to Nepali-related topics that will be useful in the future.

Every week, www.nepalitimes.com has more than 100,000 unique visitors, most of whom have bookmarked the homepage and have a habit of clicking on story links on social media. The average reader spends five minutes per page, which is remarkable for an age of short attention spans.

Nearly half of the Nepali Times’ readership online is women, mostly in the 25-64 age group. Contrary to common perception, more than 40% of readers are female, and 35% reside in Nepal. Most diaspora readers work and study in the United States, India, the UK, Australia and the Gulf, in that order.

Thank you, readers for being with us for the past 10,000 times. We, in the Nepali Times newspaper are committed to covering the next 20 years of making sense of the three-progenitred cities of democracy, media and content for the Nepali society and the world face today – and trying to find solutions.

Sanghamitra Subba
Reporter

Fresh into my first job, I entered the welcoming, sunny and dog-friendly newsroom of the Nepali Times. It was a different vibe, bright-eyed and ready to learn from the editors and reporters whose work I had admired as a student reading through the colourful newspaper every Friday in the library.

In my first week, I was invited to join a journalism dialogue between graduate students from India, Pakistan and Nepal. These three days provided a crash course in跨境交流 and fed my interest in reporting. This was the beginning of many amazing opportunities that I have had. I have learned how to speak to Nepali Times.

With the freedom to pursue the topics that I wanted to and the encouragement of generous conversation, I covered everything from community development in Karnataka to migrant workers in Pakistan to multilateral marriages. At every step, I received the greatest guidance of mentors who taught me everything they knew, including being a frontline interviewer, editing videos and most importantly, maintaining contact with sources. This taught me that being a good journalist is more than just the money: there are things like networking and finding your way in the world.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Except from Nepal Times Online edition of 11 March, 2010

In an editorial fifteen years ago, this week, Nepal Times wrote about losing good workers who were leaving their jobs to start their own businesses. The story is moving to today today, where the worker’s choice has already been made and employees are not so prone to ‘strike out’. An excerpt.

Urban sprawl is gobbling Kathmandu’s farms at an unprecedented rate, and may wipe them out within a couple of decades. From 16.101, the proportion of cultivated land in Kathmandu shrank from 9% to 4.8% (so say the average farmers).he area has shrunk drastically. Farmers have found it more profitable to sell their farms, usually to people seeking to live out of town, than to use them. In fact, a statistician has noted a huge drop in agricultural yield. The rising cost of living has hit the prices.
HAPPY INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY
Nepal’s history foretold

Those who do not learn from the past are destined to repeat it

When the Nepali Times was reporting to launch two decades ago, many Nepalis were sad, frightened, and looking for ways to leave areas affected by armed conflict, and then Nepal altogether.

A few decades later, Nepal is at peace with numerous challenges, but at least it is at peace.

Anil Chitrakar

Nepal went from war to peace and from monarchy to republic, it initiated some of the guerrillas into the national army, it held elections at all: three levels of government under a new federal constitution, and the ruling party promised citizens stability and a better quality of life. The earthquake, the Indian blockade, endemic corruption and a lack of trust in government, businesses houses and political parties have slowed things down.

Throughout those last 20 years, the Nepali Times team had a side side seat to history being made. It worked hard and worked smart and issues after issues, it kept the hopes and aspirations of Nepal as high as it could with facts, data, images, animation, analysis and yes, even humour.

The colourful and elegantly designed pages of the Nepali Times became conversation pieces every Friday, raising public consciousness about critical issues and allowing people to form communities and organise for action.

The paper became a catalyst, and provided a medium for small and big actions around health, environment, the economy, gender and justice. Confused by day-to-day politics, many of us readers looked forward week after week to stay informed and to make personal and collective decisions based on what the Nepali Times covered, analysed and projected.

But even while the Nepali Times marks this 100th issue, the future of free press and the financial viability of publications cannot and should not be taken for granted. People in power have tried to manipulate or control the media to consolidate power and personal wealth. Media outlets that do not fall in line are under attack. The legacy media, already under financial strain because of the internet, is also facing pressure from the government. This newspaper has been made to suffer for its independence. It has been attacked by both the extreme left and the extreme right in the past 20 years.

Those thousand issues of the Nepali Times will eventually be lost, and a site search of any subject will show that this archive provides a valuable window on Nepal’s recent history. Future generations of historians will find a handy narrative of how Nepal made its great transition. And perhaps a book summarising the times of Nepali Times would ensure that history is not written by the winnners. As regular writers for the Nepali Times, we crave ‘shell life’, which these archives give us. And this means remembering not to forget what we lived through in the past 20 years, so that we do not repeat the fearful times of conflict, the royal massacre, the communal riots of 2006, or the abuses of human rights in the name of revolution that has left deep scars in Nepali society.

The earthquake united the Nepali people unlike the politics that divided us. Disasters seem to bring out the best in us, and politics the worst. In the next two decades Nepal will reap what it has sown in the past.

The unresolved issues in the Constitution and the challenges related to identity politics, correcting historical wrongs, growing inequality in the Kathmandu valley, corruption and fraud are what we will now be grappling with.

Anil Chitrakar

President of SouthBank and writer for Kathmandu Valley 80s for the Nepali Times.

What is Sagarmatha VIP On The Spot?

Sagarmatha VIP On The Spot is an innovative vehicle insurance policy from Sagarmatha Insurance which ensures instant, on-the-spot settlement of claims that arise in case of accident or damage to your two or four-wheeler.

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- Waiver-Free Claim Processing
- Transparent Policy
- Less Paperwork
- Customer Service

Turkish Airlines

Samsung and Turkish Airlines announced a new partnership on 2 March which will allow Samsung customers pre-booking the Galaxy Z Fold 2 and 5G smart phones special discounts from Turkish Airlines along with a chance to qualify for a grand lucky draw by one business class round trip to any Turkish Airlines destination.

IATA Awards

The International Air Transport Association (IATA) announced on March that nominations are being taken for the second edition of the VAR, Diversity & Inclusion Awards, which recognizes and encourages industry excellence. Nominations can be made in the following three categories: Inclusion, High Flier, and Diversity & Inclusion Team Award.

Scofield Crowne Plaza

Scofield Crowne Plaza is hosting the Russian national karate team from 19 March. The team is in Nepal to promote sports and strengthens the relationship between Russia and Nepal. The visit is supported by the Russian Embassy, 2020, and the National Sports Council.

NMB Bank

NMB Bank launched an enhanced variant of its Here I am card, with a limit of up to $2,000 per annum for 5 years. The maximum tenure under NMB loan and card must be extended up to 35 years.

NIC Asia

NIC Asia Bank Limited has extended $100,000 to Shree Devalok Secondary School in Surkhet on 4 March. The school will use the funds to purchase supplies.

Thai health measures

Thai international has added new precautions in view of the COVID-19 spread. High-risk destinations will now not have pillows and blankets, nor hot or cold towels. Since the airlines requires random COVID tests and inoculations have been ramped up after any flight.
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Prajwal Parajuly on Indian-Nepali hybridity

Prajwal Parajuly speaks to Filip Noubel about how Nepali and Indian-Nepali identities are experienced. Excerpts:

What a privilege it is to acknowledge Indian literature at a book fair in Paris. It brings a spotlight on books one wouldn’t have ordinarily picked up. It brings up the importance of translations. Translators will keep the world sane.

Why are mixed or shifting identities such an important source of your inspiration?

In 2001, a group of us visited Benares and Gaya. We often confronted confused looks from ‘heartland’ Indians. Congrats may hoosly thyme with Bengalis, but that was still no reason for a fellow Indian not to know where it was. We were thought of as being from Thailand or Bhutan. Many Indians didn’t even know that Sikkim was a part of India. Anyone who grows up in the northeast of the country will have encountered questions of identity more than the average Indian. There’s no escaping it for the Nepali-Indian who has to stress his nationality every time she mentions her ethnicity. The northeast is almost always a footnote in the average Indian’s consciousness.

Who are the Nepali and Indian authors who deserve more global attention, possibly translation, according to you?

Where do I begin? Narayan Wagle, who is likely the biggest-selling Nepali-language writer in the world, deserves to be translated widely. I would also mention Nepali-language writer Indra Baburaj Rai. Tashi Chophel, whose How to Collect a Folk Tale was recently published by Rucha Publications, deserves global readers. He’s undoubtedly one of the best poets in the country. Others include Chetan Raj Shrestha, Sandip Roy and Sunaina Roy. For us to understand Nepal through non-fiction, Supraya Shakya’s Unthaching the Vajra is a must-read. I am also looking forward to Amital Rai Mishra’s new book on Nepal and China. Sanu Lama and Bic Bikram Gurung, Nepali-language writers from Sikkim and Darjeeling, also deserve a worldwide readership.

Your books have been and are being translated. How closely do you work with your translators? I work very closely with the translators. I enjoy the process, a translator’s interpretation of my work. Bettina Duvvury, my French translator, and I had worked before for a wonderful French magazine called Japenut. Collaborating with her on Pair of Seagulls felt like being reunited with a close friend. My parents translated my book into Nepali. My characters often speak in Nepali, so for their conversation to be rendered in English by me entailed a process of translation. In many ways, my translators are translating conversations that are already translated. Translators are such amazing people. To translate is a selfless act.

What’s the reading culture like in India and Nepal now? You’ve caught me at a strange time. I just discovered that pirated copies of my books have infiltrated the market. I guess I should be flattered because the bottom line is that people are reading. Of the hundreds of challenges I face as a writer, I never thought tackling counterfeit copies would be right up there. It is a most exciting time to be a writer in India if the proliferation of literary festivals is any indication. I am amazed by what we see at Racha Books, my book publisher. The store has become a tourist destination. Imagine a bookstore being on every must-visit list! People are reading, and books sell. When in Kathmandu recently, I went to Nepalness, my Nepali-language publishers, and saw that the Nepali translation of The Girl’s Daughter had sold over 10,000 copies.

Isn’t that wonderful? The book being read by the very people it was about in the very language the characters speak in! Smart-warming. The book has reached the most remote corners of Nepal. Dodd Peti

"लो भ, लालच र प्रभावगत नायडौ अबः नेपाली हिंदी विश्वास लागी सब।"
"समस्त, सामाजिक र राष्ट्रीय सशक्तिकरणः नेपाली हिंदीको अनौषध विश्वसनीयम र।"
"सौरेन्द्र, रूपमणि र रोयलकरी रहिति आफै बढीः नेपाली हिंदी र तरुणपार हामी नसली ह।"
Legacy media retains readers despite social media spread

Kunda Dixit

The results of the Sharecast Initiative Survey 2020 show that the proliferation of mobile internet has put pressure on print and broadcast media, and that although the audience for traditional media has shrunk in the past, it is holding on to its readership for now.

Ninety-six percent of Nepal’s households own at least one mobile device and more than half of those are smart phones. This means that the spread of 4G wireless is bringing millions more Nepalis within reach of mobile data. In fact, the survey shows a surprisingly narrow urban-rural digital divide.

The surge in mobile-based internet use is clearly visible in the sharp rise in YouTube users from single digits to 56% in three years.

Nepalis have benefited from instantly available news and easy access to videos on pocket devices. The biggest impact of the migration of readers to this interest is on advertising – as the audience goes online, advertisers are starting to follow the eyeballs.

While only 28% of respondents said they used the internet every day, daily logsins are highest among the educated (60%), and among civil servants (54%). A stark geographical digital divide persists between Karnali Province (4%) and Far Western Province (6%). Some 4,839 respondents in all seven provinces were surveyed by Sharecast Initiative in January and February this year to measure their ownership of communication devices, mass media consumption patterns, and views on the press.

The annual poll also tracks the popularity of radio and television channels and current trends in social-media engagement and internet use.

The survey shows a profound penetration of news and entertainment portals and YouTube channels, with legacy media scrambling to stay catch up. Surprisingly, from 6% of Nepal’s rural FM radio stations has not decreased, staying at about 28%.

Nearly half the respondents said they relied on FM radio for local news, and interestingly, Facebook was the source of local news for 20% of them. Most people do not have a radio receiver at home anymore, and 40% listen to radio programs on their mobiles.

The total number watching television every day is much higher at 41%, and like with radio this figure has stayed constant for the past three years. Not surprisingly, the numbers watching television daily was twice as high in cities as in villages.

The number of people reading newspapers has actually increased from 6% in 2018 to 9.8% in the latest poll. More men than women read newspapers, and readers tend to live in the cities and belong to a higher income bracket. Sobotting fact: 78% of Nepal women say they do not read newspapers at all.

Despite the drift towards the internet, however, the proportion of people who say that they rely on traditional media for national and international news has increased slightly in the past three years. In 2018, 36%, 30% and 4% of respondents said they get their information from radio, television and newspapers/magazines respectively. By 2020, those figures were 45%, 47% and 4%.

Nepalis may follow social media posts, but only 2% said they trust the information on them. The mainstream press is not seen as credible either, but the level of trust in radio, television and newspaper content is higher than the trust in social media. The reason most people said they do not read print newspapers and magazines is because these are not available in their localities.

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आफ्नो बचतलाई सुरक्षा र उद्धवत तृप्ति दिन आफ्नो उल्लेखनीय अप्रत्यक्ष बैंकिङ खाता जोग्यकर्ता ।

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**About Town**

**EVENTS**

DevRaNa documentary
Watch Dev RaNa: Music and through its documentary about the 45-year musical journey of the legendary drummer. 7 March, 12pm-2pm, Bikalpa Social Venture, Dhulikhel. 9811176379

Holi
Mark the festival of colours with your family, friends and loved ones. Celebrate responsibly. 15 March

**MUSIC**

Gaule Bhai
Enjoy a blend of Nepali folk and western music that sounds like the amalgamation of Tamang Ska and rock. 11 March, Anam Chowk, Pashupati, Kathmandu. 9811177207

The Elements Live
See the elements performing Nepali music.
6 March, 8pm onwards, Ticket: Rs.200
Garuda Pub and Lounge, Jom reife, 9815734792

**DINING**

Russian Food Festival
Experience the very best of Russian cuisine as celebrity chef Andrei Zakh and his assistant Maxim Voita make delicious traditional dishes. Enjoy traditional Russian dance performances, music and art. 14-12 March, 6pm-10pm, Time: 19599, The Sun Café, Lakeside. 9811176118

Haggis Hotpot
If you plan on visiting Haggis Hotpot any time soon, make sure to taste a couple of friends with you because hotpot is best had with a side of good and hungry company. Haggis offers a wide variety of meats and vegetables with which to create your own savoury sauce and delicious sides to tide over you while it cooses. 5pm-10pm, Avasa, Tundikhel. 9816904999

Rain Restaurant
Take in the view of Patan and Jawalakhel and grab a Kushal set, braised pork belly or assortment of teas at Rain Restaurant, Jawalakhel. 981548538

**ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI**

Kripa Joshi
Water is a precious resource and becomes even more precious as the world’s population grows. Rain water can be harvested to use around the house and garden. It is specially good for gardens as it is naturally devoid of chemicals and hard minerals. Rain can be collected in many ways, from the simplest vessels to elaborate systems. You can create a simple DIY water harvesting system using a barrel, a screen for filtering and a tap.

**GETAWAY**

Newa Chen
This bistro is reminiscent of the garden era of the Newa dynasty. The open rooms and courtyards make the patrons of those who once ruled the valley. Mohan, Lalitpur. 9811176052

**OUR PICK**

**Bikalpa Farmers Market**
Visit the Bikalpa Farmers market for green products, organic food and vegetables, processed products and fresh goods. Activities for kids are included as well.
7 March, 8:30am-4pm, Bikalpa Art Center, Patchewal. 981173224

**Alfarabé at Dishkaina**
Shop for sustainable products like organic honey, vegetables and eggs, fresh peeled goods, books, and locally made artisan crafts at this Sunday market. Every Sunday, 8am-2pm, Bhaktapur Café, Kirti Migan Kendu, Patan Bazaar. 9810238088

**The Pillarous Himalayas**
This resort has Nepals first full-scale themed luxury eco-luxury that offer every amenity that you could possibly need. The spa also has some of the best treatments, guaranteeing rest and relaxation. Dhulikhel, 9816001877

**Chimaile Village Resort**
Its grounds dotted with trees, this resort is an ideal destination for anyone seeking to escape the madness of Kathmandu’s city. Chame, 9811176077.

**AIR QUALITY INDEX**

KATHMANDU, 28 February - 5 March

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>PM2.5</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28 Feb</td>
<td>20 – 50</td>
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<td>29 Feb</td>
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<td>101 – 150</td>
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Rain during the week reduced pollution levels, improving the Air Quality Index (AQI) at Kathmandu’s city center. At times, it was even lower than the 50-100 category. Daily averages remained in the ‘unhealthy’ category. Rain expected over the weekend could push all of the pollutants, fortunately the AQI readings go to www.nepalpolmonline.com.

https://epa.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-meter/

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WELCOME TO NEPAL: India's new ambassador to Nepal Virendra Mohan Kaushal presents his credentials to President Bidya Devi Bhandari at Kathmandu on Thursday.

WOMEN LEADERS: Researcher Pushpa Pandey, sports star Aynshika Shrestha, journalist Aurora Pandey, entrepreneur Rama Sharma and computer engineer Sania Muranjan during an event organized by Women's Cell Nepal last week.
Fire And Ice first opened its doors in Kathmandu in January 1995. It immediately became a very popular restaurant amongst travelers, climbers and local residents as the place to meet for a morning cup of Italian espresso, or later on in the day to share stories and travel tales with friends whilst savoring delicious Pizza, Pastas, Organic salads, desserts and even a Grappa after Dinner.

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COVID-19 revives Nepal’s WASH drive

Sonia Awale

Many Nepalis woke up on Wednesday to an early-morning SMS from the Ministry of Health and Population: ‘Let’s wash our hands with soap and wash regularly and if possible refrain from going to crowded places to be safe from coronavirus disease. Cover your mouth and nose while coughing or sneezing.’
The public service announcement was aimed at stopping the spread of COVID-19, but will revive Nepal’s hand-washing drive to control other infections like diarrhoea and typhoid that still mainly exist.

COVID-19 has hit 70 countries. New infections and fatalities are tapering off in China, but the outbreak is spreading in Iran, Europe and the United States. Visit Nepal Year 2020 has been shelved, the Sagarmatha Sambandh postponed, and the U.S. Embassy has put off its Independence Day celebration at Pizza Darbar.

“There is still widespread lack of awareness about hand-washing, even right here in Kathmandu among marginalized communities,” says Birendra Adhikari, principal of Pulchowk School in Gederi.

“Schools play an important role in educating children, their families and the community as a whole. This becomes especially important with the rise of new emerging diseases like coronavirus.”

Nicky Lama of Eko Soap Bank Nepal, which supplies recycled hotel soap to schools, has been visiting government schools in Kathmandu to train children in hand hygiene.

“We have been training students and teachers so parents are also sensitized. It is a protective measure against not only coronavirus but already existing infectious diseases like typhoid,” says Lama.

Nepal was declared free of open defecation last year, and is a model for the region. While this is dramatic progress from 1990 when only 6% of households had toilets, public health workers have raised questions about poorly maintained toilets and lack of water supply.

In a 2018 study, the Global Sanitation Fund Programme found that 3% of households in communities declared ‘open defecation free’ did not in fact have toilets, and that in 5% of families who had a toilet at home, at least one member continued to defecate outdoors.

Despite declaring open defecation free, toilet infrastructure is not always optimum, septic tanks are now filling up and availability and quality of water is questionable, particularly in urban slums,” says Samphry Chhonlang, hygiene officer at WaterAid Nepal. “But most health workers are focused on preventive measures and often wait for the outbreaks to happen instead of preventing them.”

The additional challenge for the WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) campaign in Nepal comes from the lack of clarity about jurisdiction and roles of each tier of government in the new federal structure.

A new bill on WASH is undergoing review at the parliament.

Good news is that some municipalities have started collecting household-level sanitation, hygiene and water data using the GIS-based upp NWASH, Says Gauri Shrestha, policy specialist at the NGO WaterAid Nepal. “Moving ahead we need to find and reach all the areas that do not have proper water and sanitation facilities yet. The challenge is to reach all 753 level bodies and as soon as possible.”

RECYCLING SOAP

Nicky Lama was volunteering at a hospital in Cambodia when she met Gunu Lahat, of Eko Soap Bank and Top Ten CNN Hero of 2017. She was so moved by his commitment to improve childhood hygiene that she decided to return to Nepal and bring with her the campaign of collecting used soap from foreign hotels and repackaging it to improve hygiene in schools.

Thousands of children die every year from typhoid due to diarrheal dehydration and typhoid. These illnesses have faciil- itated transmission which can be easily prevented through regular handwashing.

Lahat’s founded Eko Soap Bank in 2014 with the aim of saving, sanitising, and supplying recycled hotel soap for the developing world. The soap bank is currently operating in ten countries: Cambodia, Laos, Bangladesh, Burundi, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and now Nepal.

The Nepal branch works independently from the network and was set up three years ago. It networks with 23 hotels in Kathmandu including the Nepal Regency, Hotel Annagiri, Sohail Crown Plaza and Kathmandu Guest House. Women in its Swayambhu workshop process the soap to produce 2,000 bars of recycled soap per year, most of which are distributed in government schools in parts of Kathmandu Valley.

“At the moment we are a small set-up, but we plan to expand to hotels in Chitwan and Parsa, set up workshops there, employ many more disadvantaged women and help spread hand hygiene awareness in schools,” says Lama, who is now country director of Eko Soap Bank Nepal.

After finishing high school in Kalimpong, Lama went to the UK to study International Development. She then worked in Zambia introducing tablet computers in community schools. Later, in Cambodia, she volunteered at a children’s hospital.

Eko Soap Bank Nepal is looking to collaborate with agencies working on the WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) campaign. “We want to not only promote eco soap banks but also create employment and spread the message about handwashing with a focus on the prevention side of healthcare,” says Nal Kvannah, an admin officer to the Nepal operation.

The added benefit of the Eko Soap Bank concept is that it promotes a cost-effective hygiene product that also reduces waste generated by the hotel industry. Says project coordinator Narendran Lakmichang: “There is a misconception that recycled goods cannot be used. We need to change that, while at the same time creating jobs for women.”
Women who fly high

Etihad Airways Vice President for the Subcontinent, Neerja Bhatia (above) is in Kathmandu this week to honour four Nepalis on the occasion of International Women’s Day. Nepali Times asked her about the awards.

Nepali Times: Etihad Airways recently marked 15 years of service to the Subcontinent. How has the journey been so far?

It has been incredible. Etihad launched daily flights between the UAE capital, Abu Dhabi, and India in September 2004, which quickly grew to 12 destinations across the Subcontinent including launching flights to Nepal in 2007. Since then we have flown over 1.5 million passengers between Kathmandu and Abu Dhabi.

In Nepal, we recently introduced our newly restyled A330 with streaming, improved legroom and new dining menus to this route. The increased capacity provides business and leisure travellers with convenient timings to travel between Kathmandu and Abu Dhabi and seamless connections across Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

The new Midfield terminal in Abu Dhabi will have 65 aerobridges, and the Abu Dhabi Airports Company is conducting tests on major elements of the facility.

What are the advantages of having US immigration clearance in Abu Dhabi itself for transit passengers from Kathmandu?

For guests from Kathmandu, New York, Chicago and Washington are amongst the top destinations in the USA, with New York ranking the highest. One of the key drivers for this is the US Pre-Clearance facility offered by Etihad. Our guests are able to pre-clear U.S. Immigration and Customs at Abu Dhabi International Airport before boarding their US-bound flights.

The US pre-clearance has been extremely popular with our travellers, particularly those from the Subcontinent and provides Etihad guests the unique opportunity to pass through all required checks including US customs, immigration and security conveniently before they board their flight, enabling them to avoid queues on arrival.

The US pre-clearance means baggage security screening moves United States TSA security standards, allowing travellers connecting on to US domestic flights to have their baggage checked from Abu Dhabi to their final destination.

Etihad is using biofuel on its ‘Greenliner’. Can this be realistically upscaled?

Yes, definitely — that is the objective of the program. We launched the first-of-its-kind ‘eco partnership’ known as the Greenliner programme in partnership with Boeing in November. The specially designed flagship Boeing 787-10 Dreamliner and other aircraft in the 787 fleet will be used to test products, procedures and initiatives designed to reduce carbon emissions.

You are in Kathmandu to mark International Women’s Day by awarding Nepali women and Etihad’s own Nepal manager as a woman. What are some other gender milestones in your career?

Yes, our entire senior management team in India is women, including myself. Head of Marketing for the Subcontinent is Pooja Sharma, Cargo and Logistics Commercial Director in Lathe Narayan, and the Etihad Regional Airport Manager for the online Subcontinent and Africa is Shemeen Kajar.

Etihad is committed to fostering a culture of inclusion and to establishing and supporting a workplace where all 26,369 Etihad Aviation Group employees, from over 100 countries, are valued, respected and supported. Emphasis is placed on supporting diverse talent to maximise engagement, contribution and advancement as well as creating targeted development programmes to accelerate the advancement of women. Today, 6,736 of the employees at Etihad Aviation Group are women.

Women in travel awards

Etihad Airways on Thursday honoured three of Nepal’s most senior women professionals in the travel and tourism industry and one young professional in hospitality alongside top travel partner agents at its annual travel awards at the Kathmandu Marriott Hotel.

Ambika Upreti
President of Worldwide’s Group of Hotels & Resorts, honorary Consul of Spain in Nepal

Sreejaya Rana
Executive Director of the Amarcoro Group, President of Hotel Association Nepal, and Nepal India Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Lucky Cheeti
Founder: Empowering Women of Nepal (EWN) and Three ‘S’ (series) Advocacy Thinking

Bishara Bhatta
Joint Managing Director, The Radisson Hotel, Kathmandu
Women guides earn more

Sonam Choekyi Lama

Eighty women enrolled in the Nepal Mountain Academy’s training for trekking guides this year, more than double the number last year. No doubt some had heard the demand for female guides is so high that they can earn more than their male counterparts. Nepal’s first women run trekking company, Three Sisters, was founded 20 years ago in Pokhara, but of the 17,164 licensed guides in Nepal only 866 are female.

Lakpa Bhuti Sherpa, President of the Nepal Mountain Academy (NMA), reminisces when male colleagues asked what the point was in training women as trekking guides when they couldn’t obtain a license. “Why not!” she recalls replying.

Indeed, as women become more educated and travel more, they see opportunities in being guides. Many trekking groups are all-female or have many women among their members and they prefer women guides, who seem to understand their needs better.

“We have women here who have climbed Everest; we have conservationists, financial managers, graduate students and even homemakers. I feel very proud to see them getting the confidence to join,” says Sherpa.

Prospective guides must complete 35 days of classes and field work in rock climbing, emergency response, environmental awareness, and learning about cultures.

“I cannot wait to lead my first trek,” says Sanita Dahal, 28, who is married and has just finished her guide training.

Shanti Rai was awarded a fellowship in 2018 for Solo Women Travellers, and the experience convinced her about what she should do with her life. “After my 90 days travelling alone through Nepal, I felt what I had seen and experienced was so authentic that I wanted to share those stories and journeys with the rest of the world, and to inspire other travellers like me,” says Rai.

Deurali Chamling, 35, climbed Mt. Everest in 2019, but says society is always putting limits on what women can and cannot do. She says of being a guide: “I can travel places, earn and meet a whole range of interesting people from all over the world — there are so many advantages.”

NMA’s Sherpas started out as a porter and later became a kitchen worker and a guide. She says the number of trekking agencies run by women is growing, and so are the number of female guides they hire.

“Today female guides are in high demand, and they can earn more than males,” says Phuntso Jangmo Lama from Team Valley, who is the first female helicopter long-line rescuer and an Everest summiter.

She says: “Mountains and trekking know no gender — it is the strength of an individual that matters. If women are given the opportunity they can perform any kind of strength work.”
Female guides juggle work and home

Sushma Barali

Nepal’s trekking industry has been dominated by male guides, but a growing number of women are entering the profession as they gain professional reputation and security.

Female trekking guides are paid well, but gender is seasonal work and women find they are not encouraged in it by their families and society at large. Many are forced to abandon their jobs after getting married.

One of Nepal’s seniormost women guides is Neena Singh Skambrak, above, left, who has 30 years of experience. She remembers taking her first group of Japanese trekking in Dhauliki when she was just 19.

“I had no work experience and family and friends told me not to do it,” recalls Skambrak, whose career took off after she learnt to speak Japanese and gained experience taking clients to Annapurna and Everest Base Camps.

Maya Gurung, above, below, owns her own company, Everest Women’s Expedition, and is a climber herself, but it is a challenge for her daughters to stay on the job.

“Despair from family, societal pressure, uncertainty about the future as well as the restriction on work after marriage mean many female guides have not been able to stay on,” explains Maya Gurung.

“Take Gotta Thapa, who became a trekking guide against her parents’ wishes because they did not think it was a respectable job.” Even though I earn my own living, my family still tells me to go find a real job,” says Thapa, who was criticized for “wandering from place to place without getting married.”

Financially independent, Thapa has decided not to get married at all because it would mean quitting her job. She says: “It is our responsibility to set an example to the next generation to resist those who restrict women from working for career goals.”
A goddess a

Preti Shikya has only a hazy recollection of her first year of being a Kumari living goddess at the age of three-and-a-half. She had no inkling at the time of the importance of her position or the reverence with which she was regarded.

Shikya became the royal Kumari in 2001 and lived at the official residence of the living goddess in Basantapur for eight years until the end of her tenure in 2009. During that time, her parents visited her once every week, not as family, but as worshippers.

When they visited, Shikya addressed her parents, as per protocol, as she would any other devotee. “My caretaker and his family became my family,” remembers Shikya (left, now 22 and an undergraduate student of business.

She keeps in touch with Gauri Shikya and recently, visited her Kumari days home as often as she can. She meets even more regularly with Durga Shikya, the twin sister of Durga Shikya, whom she calls Durga gupu. “I am very close to her,” Shikya says.

Trail-running trail blazer

Catching up with Mira Rai six years after Nepali Times first profiled her

Lately, world-renowned trail-runner Mira Rai has been busy with documentary filming, physiotherapy, organising the fifth Bhutan Trail Race, inspiring young Nepali athletes through her MINI Run Initiative, and preparing for a competition in Europe.

When she’s not travelling the world, changing lives or adventurers in remote Nepal, Mira tries to make time for wall climbing and bicycling. Nepali Times first and the international sports scene. Having participated in ultra-marathons and trail runs around the globe, Rai has an impressive repertoire of firsts under her belt. "Ultra distance is my favourite," she says, but her most memorable is the Mont-Blanc 80-km marathon she completed in 2011.

"Nepal had just been devastated by the earthquake and I wanted to be there to lift the spirits of fellow Nepalis," recalls Rai. "I just kept running and running and when I crossed the finish line, it was my proudest moment."

I will never forget,” she says, "when my injury last year kept Rai off the trail. Taking a year off after surgery, Rai has been in physiotherapy to prepare for her return to training. She has used the time to expand the Mira Rai Initiative to promote trail-running, support female athletes and launch an annual ultramarathon.

Rai credits former mountaineer Angsana Magar, the national karateka who gained recognition in the 2019 South Asian Games, with supporting her throughout her journey. "She met with me when I was paralysed in their late teens, and found they share a deep passion for sports."

My goal is to support myself throughout my career, and I do not know what I would do without them," says Rai for finding a roommate, who has been especially supportive this past year, and who has been recovering from her injury and unable to participate in marathons.

"I'm very grateful to Mira Rai does not stop. She says. "As a young girl from rural Nepal, I never even dreamed of the opportunity."

"I want to give other young Nepalis an opportunity to accomplish what I have. I want to keep running till the end, I want to keep running till the end."

Xhangamitra Saba

Coming soon:

Ani Choying, the movie

As she enters through the door, a radiant smile on her face, the living room fills with her peaceful, positive energy. Dressed in a maroon jacket and rebo, Ani Choying-Drolma sits down to talk about how her life has changed since the Nepal Times first profiled her in 2003.

“We have come a long way, haven’t we?” the 50-year-old nun asks.

After fleeing a violent home at the age of 14, Ani Choying started a monastery in Kathmandu, where she was discovered by a passing American singer. Over the past 20 years, she has produced more than 30 albums and performed in concerts all over the world. Her biography Stoning the Prophet, which describes her journey of transformation from a frightened child to a powerful, singing nun, has been translated into 14 languages.

Ani Choying says she has no desire for human passion. "It’s only wish for the world, and to fight her demons until she is free from all evil," she explains.

She has been involved with the Nunn’s Welfare Foundation and Ayra Tara School, where she works with nuns and monks.

"I think I have led my life in the best way as a nun and as a nun," she says. Ani Choying, who, in addition to being called the sitting nun, refers to her as the 'prophetic nun' for her social-worker activities, which she funds with earnings from her concerts. Sipping hot water, she discusses that a film maker is shooting a biopic about her, but she does not want to divulge details just yet.

"I want to spread peace and happiness through my songs and thankfully, I have received such compliments abroad even from those who don’t understand the Nepali language," she says. "I was not initially ready for a filmic biography, but now, at 50, I am ready. I have had a beautiful life and maybe the world can soon see this life pictured on the screen. Why not?"

From kamlar

Shahza Chaudhary’s journey from Kamlar to Member of Parliament has been a long and difficult one. The harrowing details of her childhood as a slave are recorded in her 2013 biography Kamlar Doki Sahsaa Samma.

At the age of eight, Chaudhary was leased for Rs7,500 to her owner in Dang, and years of trauma followed. "I could not walk without physical pain," Chaudhary told the Nepal Times in a profile from 2012. ("But that was unbearable."

Chaudhary had a burning desire to go to school as did the children of the family she was indentured to, and to read and play like others her age. But all she was allowed to do was stand in a corner and watch the family’s children dress in their uniforms and leave for their lessons. As a teenager, Chaudhary
When Shakya returned to her old family home at age 11, she knew no life other than that of a goddess and found it difficult to adjust. She says, “I had forgotten how to walk because I wasn’t used to walking as a Kumari. I was carried around everywhere.” On the streets, she felt like people were staring at her, and the vehicles that passed frightened her. “I was seeing a car for the first time in my life, and it was surreal and scary.” Shakya found it difficult in school, too. But the teacher introduced her to the class as a former Kumari, and her classmates were excited to know her. “Everyone called me over to sit with them in class,” she recalls. “They would ask me lots of questions.” Unlike her peers, she was not coached or punished by teachers.

Nepali Times first featured Pratima Sherpa during her first year as Kumari in 2001 (left) and again in 2004. Now, over a decade after the end of her tenure, everything has returned to normal. Shakya is a fourth-year Bachelor of Business Studies (BBS) student at Prime College, and will decide what is next after graduation. Since pictures of Shakya as Kumari are still around, people occasionally recognize her on the streets, and that makes her happy. Shakya looks back at her time as Kumari with fondness. “I feel sorry to be the Kumari. Her birth chart has to match the King’s. It is a matter of pride for me that out of so many girls, I was chosen. It still makes me feel special.”

Shristi Karki

Pratima Sherpa swings for pro

The 20-year-old golfer on how life has changed since her first tournament in 2017

“Sometimes I have a tournament and a midterm exam on the same day and those days can be very hectic,” she laughed during a recent phone interview with Nepali Times. When she met him, Sherpa’s idol Tiger Woods advised her to work on her course management. “I still remember him saying ‘Hit Pratima’ whom we first met,” recalls Sherpa. “I don’t think I’ll ever forget that or the fact that he said that my swing was perfect.”

During her meeting with Woods, Sherpa was filming for an ESPN documentary, A Mountain to Climb, which chronicled her journey from the Nepali Times first golf tournament in Kathmandu to her stay in California, on her way to become the first golfer ever to be the subject of a feature on her career. The year 2017 also saw the publication of her book, The Art of Golfing, in Nepal.

With the help of her host family, Sherpa became the first Nepali to compete in the The Symetra Tour in 2017, a tournament organized by the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA). After she finishes college in 2022, Sherpa will be eligible again to compete in the Q School tournament and thereby try for professional status in Nepal. No matter what changes in her life, Sherpa has her eyes set on one goal: to be Nepal’s first female professional golfer.

Sanghita Subba
1,000 weeks of Nepali Times

The times of Nepal, they are a-changin’

Mark Turin

R
telling for 2020 and running to a full 20 page, the ‘demo
tras’ of the Nepali Times, NT #6, was printed and
alas issued in early July 2000 (believed, its
nadustrious masthead asserted that it would be ‘Nepal’s Top Newspaper’. This
n was at the height of Nepal’s civil

conflict, and the front cover led with the headline ‘The people don’t want war’. Alongside ran a ‘Publisher’s Note’ extolling the virtues of balance, objectivity and professionalism in the media, and pushing back against the dominant

ceism of the time.

many of the contributors to this
demise issue would go on to become
regular columnists, including C K
Lal with his thought-provoking ‘State of the State’, the late and direct

Barbara Adams and her ‘Barba’,

Sujay Shyakya writing under the

pseudonym Atila Feed in a wide-

ranging column entitled ‘Economic Sense’, and editor Kunda Dixit’s

’spicy’ ‘Under My Hat’ series on

the back page. A first-rate collection of

Nepali writers and journalists

filled out the rest of the issue. The

publishing landscape of Nepal was

about to change forever.

In the following week’s issue, NT #1 (19-25 July, 2000), editor Kunda Dixit answered an implicit question that many were asking: why this weekly, now, and why in English? Noting that 1,300

newspapers were currently

registered in Nepal, Dixit made an impassioned case for the relevance of an

English-language weekly, stating that the Nepali Times would ‘take the

concerns of those who

matter to those who matter’, and do so by talking ‘about us in a language

that they understand’. An

essential element in

achieving this broader goal was the

page of translated articles ‘From

the Nepali Press’ that became a

regular, and much anticipated,

weekly feature of the newspaper,

ensuring that important local and

national news received appropriate

attention in Nepal’s English

speaking international community.

Twenty years since the first issue, I caught up with Publisher and Editor Kunda Dixit to ask about the present and future of the Nepali Times.

Mark Turin: What were your goals in establishing the Nepali Times in 2000?

Kunda Dixit: We aimed for the Nepali Times to be a window on the

whole of Nepal — not just Kathmandu — for the outside world.

We opted for the ‘Nerdfox’ tabloid format with visually rich design,

world-class production values, and a lively presentation of serious

and not-so-serious issues. In short, a paper that people would read over

to cover. Actually, I could quote from the Editorial from NT #1 on

19 July 2000: ‘Nepal Times will aspire to be a true reflection of our
times — a journal to record the life and times of Nepal in the decades

ahead.’

Have your goals changed over time?

We never had a big circulation
compared to the Nepali-language

tabloids, but very soon after

starting we sensed that we had

influence disproportionate to our

reach. The reason was obvious: the

language, subscription price, and

subjects we dealt with, put us in

a different bracket. A former Finance

Minister once told me the Nepali

Times had given him nerves because

donors came to meetings on Fridays

carrying the morning’s print.

edition. Not much has changed in

terms of the mission and vision of

the paper. We haven’t even

tamped down with designer Rustom

Vaneck’s original masthead and page

arrangement — it has stayed the

same for 20 years.

What changes have you seen in the

publishing landscape in Nepal

since you launched the Nepali

Times in 2000?

Nepal’s media terrain is

transformed because of the internet,

as elsewhere. The business model

of legacy media has collapsed.

While readers’ eyeballs have

migrated online, many advertisers

haven’t. People get their breaking

news from social media, but the

Nepali Times was never in the

business of hard news, so we

haven’t had to change our focus

much. However, we do understand

our role now also in terms of

countering the fake news and

alternative facts being propagated

on the social web. Our role is still
to explain, explore and exaggerate.

In general, the text is shorter now

because of shorter attention spans

of readers, which means there’s

tighter editing. We try to show

more, say less. And we have

revamped our digital edition since
ten times more readers access us

online than in print. This means

more multimedia packages, lots

of videos, photo galleries, and

interactive infographics.

When have you felt that the

Nepali Times played a decisive

role in exploring an important

political moment or covering an

underreported issue?

A highlight would be our coverage

of the royal massacre in 2005, and

our continuous follow-up of the

story as new evidence became

available. I believe the Nepali

Times and our sister magazine,

Nhat, helped spell some of the

closer conspiracy theories. During

the conflict, we prioritised field

reports highlighting the plight of

ordinary citizens caught in the

crossfire, investigating human

rights violations, torture and

disappearances. After Gyansidha’s

coup, we defined the context by

leaving white holes in print, and

inserting ‘Voice from the

.Refer to page 14.

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Twenty years ago, in December 2000, a group of four anthropologists and historians at the University of Cambridge embarked on a project to develop new methods for collecting, protecting, and connecting collections of cultural and intellectual material from the Himalayan region in ways that would widen access through emerging digital platforms.

Sara Harrison, Alan Macfarlane, Sara Shneiderman, and I named this pilot project ‘Digital Himalayas’. We began by digitizing historical ethnographic collections held in universities and archives across Europe to protect them from obsolescence and decay, forward-migrate them to new platforms as standards changed, and share them back with their originating communities in the Himalayan region and online.

When we launched Digital Himalaya, we naively imagined that we were building a web portal primarily for users in the Global North who would have unfiltered access to the internet through fast broadband networks and that communities in the Himalayas would be better served by DVDs and hard copies held at institutes, colleges, and universities across Asia. The project also aimed to provide such materials to our colleagues in the region.

We turned out to be quite wrong. Of the more than 500,000 unique ‘sessions’ that Google Analytics has recorded, 19% have been from Nepal, 11% from the United States, 10% from India, and 8% from the United Kingdom. It is particularly satisfying that almost 100,000 web users in Nepal have accessed our content, offering a comprehensive challenge to our early assumption in 2000 that the ‘West’ would have the web and the ‘West’ would have hard discs and DVDs.

Of the 500,000 hits that the site has received since we started to track in 2005, only 5% have been from mobile devices and 1% from tablets, with the remainder being from desktop or laptop computers. However, the use of handheld devices to access Digital Himalaya content has increased dramatically over time. In the last year alone, mobile devices accounted for 25% of all visits, and given the increasing penetration of K2 mobile services across the Himalayan region, we can only expect this trend to continue.
Times change, but the Nepali Times stays the same

Marty Logan

I was sorry for me to get to the door of the Nepali Times after I first moved to Nepal in 2005. Editor Kunda Dixit and I shared ties with the later Press Service News agency – we from North America, be from Asia. What I liked about the Nepali Times then is what I still admire it for now: its reporting is issue-based. It does not focus on what happened of daily news but tries to get at the why it is happening? Other English papers in Nepal are increasingly adopting this approach, and I often see Nepali Times stories echoed in their pages.

The downside of this, I see as I click through the archives, is that it reveals that things change slowly. It is frustrating to read 15-year-old articles about famine and malnutrition in the Karnali that could have been reported yesterday. So little has the situation in some parts of the region advanced. I was in maternal and child health, quality education, reliable water supply and gender equality still make headlines 20 years after the Nepali Times started reporting on them. But I need to temper my impatience — statistically, progress has happened, it just takes longer than I want it to.

When I arrived in Nepal 15 years ago, we were a larger group in the newsroom than we are today, which is hard to believe considering that the 2020 team produces the paper version and a continuously updated news website. Back then, we printed out the pages on Thursday and each of us took turns reading each one for errors. Today, copy-editing is done mainly online, by one or two staff, while others rush to put the finishing touches on a video or update social media channels.

When I returned in 2016, it was slightly annoying to see the written paper was not the centre of everyone’s attention on deadline day, but I have come to admire the online-offline juggling done by the current writers and editors. And my disappointment that space previously reserved for text had been reduced by larger images and graphics over the years, is now balanced with the appreciation that online versions of articles can run much longer than in the paper.

As befits its name, the Nepali Times keeps changing as the years pass, adding columnists — women and men — and deep-diving into topics like labour migration, that other media simply skip. It has benefitted from its sister publication Hamal Khahautrikas and from cross-border projects with other media in Asia. Yet despite these changes, I know that if I approach Khana Duti with (yet another) article about malnutrition and maternal deaths, he will find a place for it because it remains an important issue.

Such relentlessness is unique. I would probably have thrown in the towel years ago if I found myself writing overly similar articles about the corruption and incompetence of official Nepal decades apart, or editing again a story about shortages of medicines at health posts. Nepal Times, sheen tenaciously takes a spotlight to these issues year after another year. That is worth celebrating.

Marty Logan is a writer, editor, and communications advisor who is lucky to call both Canada and Nepal home.

ONWARD

Manjushree Thapa

I’d be so old that I remember a time — back in the hoary 1990s when you couldn’t expect, or at times evenancy, from Nepal’s English-language media. My group of the Nepali language was poor then; I had to rely entirely on the English-language media to understand my society. This put me at a distinct disadvantage vis-à-vis my peers who could read the Nepali-language press. They understood not only what was happening in the nation, but how everyone—and they—felt about it. Their intellectual lives were rich with nuances I could not begin to grasp.

The Nepali Times stands as testament that those days are gone. Thanks to this paper. The Kathmandu Post, and more recent publications such as The Record, English-language media has finally come of age in Nepal. And we are all more intelligent for it.

Nepali society has always suffered from a cultural chasm between those who are fluent in the national languages and those who are limited in English. The former group is grounded in the complex lived reality of this society, and can draw upon local histories, languages, knowledge bases, and intelligence systems to understand and analyze the contemporary moment. The latter group has money. English has been a hothouse language here — the language of diplomats, aid contractors, experts, foreign academics, tourists, and a handful of nationals educated in private schools or, like me, abroad. Together, these people would want power. It would seem obvious they that try to learn the national languages, but this has not been the case. Neither it is been easy. When I decided to learn Nepali, I took year-long lessons and diligently pore over shelves of Nepali-language literature. I then began to translate what I was reading for a biweekly column in this newspaper. This investment of time and effort paid off for me: reading the work of my peers in the original language has enriched my own writing.

To expect everyone to do the same is unrealistic. What the country needed — and has now produced — was a critical mass of bilingual Nepalis to help bridge the chasm between English and the national languages. This could happen only after the 1990s, with the proliferation of English-medium schools and, crucially, with the right to free expression.

Today, when I read the Nepali Times, I do so for the multifaceted examination of a complex society. I read Mona Gurung’s interviews with contemporary women writers whose work I crave to read. I linger over Dwekar Chhetri’s smart.
Sangeeta Thapa

When the Nepal Times was morphed into a weekly newspaper from an e-platform in 2000, it was not at first with initial skepticism as the few English weekly that existed back then had changed hands, declined in quality, or just faded into oblivion.

However, this new paper swiftly made its mark as it brought on board a panel of writers and journalists whose reportage covered the nation’s socio-political struglles with insight and acumen. Nepal at this time was going through the curious or blessing of interesting times—a turbulent transition from a monarchy to the planet’s newest federal republic.

This boldness was at odds in a country where journalism had historically been censorship. The editorials and articles were well researched and unequivocal, speaking for the disenfranchised and for those who were tortured, killed and disappeared by both the Maoists and the Army. Nepal Times never compromised on fundamental issues like human rights, and even today continues to demand an inquiry into war crimes.

Well known writers and journalists such as C K Lah, Prashant Bha, Dinesh Rai, Anil Chitraker, Thomas Bell and Manju Thapa (to name a few) have written for the paper. The Nepal Times archives give us a window onto 20 years of our nation’s socio-political and cultural history; the decade-long bloody civil war which led to 16,276 deaths; the peace process, the restoration of democracy, the promulgation of the new constitution that finally got written but is already contentious and why this is so, the nomination of our first President, the earthquake, the blockade, the birth of the federal states, the political upheaval in the Terai, food shedding and the hero Kishan Chaudhary who hated the darkness imposed on the nation by the power mafia. I have enjoyed the film columns by Sophia Pande, Sawa Bhattachar’s art reviews, and Lisa Chakravarty’s writings that take us back to a time when Nepal was still Shangri-La and not the paradise lost it is today. Nepal Times also covered cultural activities and happenings: Nepahure’s nationwide peace concert tours during the insurgency, Jammanto, book launches and reviews, various culture, film and theatre festivals, the Kathmandu International Art Festival, Photo Kathmandu, the Kathmandu Triennale (which and reviews of art exhibitions in the city’s galleries. The preservation of Nepal’s tangible and intangible heritage has also been an area of focus with the Times. Nepal Times has consistently covered the critical issue of climate change and its ramifications for a country where the melting of Himalayan glaciers can displace populations and create climate refugees. But my favourite pieces in the Nepal Times are those by The Axe, which are bitingly featured on the back page. It gives us the opportunity to laugh during the darkest hours of our nation’s history, and at the absurdity of the Nepal’s present-day politics.

Sangeeta Thapa is Director of the Siddhartha Arts Foundation and Siddhartha Art Gallery in Kathmandu.
In 999 issues the *Nepali Times* has reviewed hundreds of books, from political thrillers on the Maoist conflict to novels and travelogues. Excerpts selected from perusal:

**Review**

**20 REVIEWS IN 20 YEARS**

After 20 years, the Nepali Times has reviewed hundreds of books, from political thrillers on the Maoist conflict to novels and travelogues. Excerpts selected from perusal:

**Chapambar Yubhisti Ka Raat Ram Review by Rubenica Bista**

**83-24 December 2000**

At 23, Kala has been married. She has been a pariah to her family. But, having learned to read, she is determined to raise her son one day. As the prelude to bring the mirth of having a son, her beautiful daughter dies in childbirth. The novel is a heart rending story of Kala’s loss and her struggle to raise her son. The author has drawn the background as a society which has rejected a woman who is not married and has not borne a child. The novel is a heart rending story of Kala’s loss and her struggle to raise her son. The author has drawn a picture of the society which has rejected a woman who is not married and has not borne a child.

**Down Home Narrow Land Smokes and Myths of the Kathmandu Valley with Doubt and Dubby Bhagat**

Review by Gunu Bhattarai

**15-20 October 2001**

The novel is a heart rending story of Kala’s loss and her struggle to raise her son. The author has drawn the background as a society which has rejected a woman who is not married and has not borne a child. The novel is a heart rending story of Kala’s loss and her struggle to raise her son. The author has drawn a picture of the society which has rejected a woman who is not married and has not borne a child.

**The Wayward Daughter’s Coming Review by Sena Bista**

**15-20 December 2018**

She was 19, when she arrived in France the first time. She didn’t know much about the country, but she knew she wanted to go. She arrived in Paris, the city of lights, the capital of fashion, and the expression of all that was beautiful in life. She arrived with dreams in her eyes and a heart full of hope. She arrived with dreams in her eyes and a heart full of hope.

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REFLECTS SAFETY
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2000: Constitution tinkering
Twenty years ago, too, the UN was pushing for a constitutional amendment. A multi-partyking-making 1995 Constitution was later approved by the 1990 Constituent Assembly. Neeraj Dixit and Bishal Pandey wrote an article on the front page. Except from page 1 of #26, 24-30 November 2000:
The week after Mount Everest's 1995 summit, Gauri Shankar Chaudhary sat down to read the 1990 Constitution, everyone from the left to the right was at loggerheads with the new government. Even the main opposition UNM couldn’t resist it, and the central committee came up with a number of reasons why the years of democracy had failed to delver. The conclusion reached by the UN was that it was not able to rule, not peace building, not good governance, not even corruption; democracy has failed because we have a bad constitution.

2001: The kings are dead, long live the King
The palace massacre on 7 June 2001, neatly wiped out Nepal’s entire royal family. King Gyanendra, who had just been enthroned, spoke about the need for the country to pull together. The Times quoted him as page 1 of #46, 8-15 June 2001: “This was an unspeakable tragedy in our country’s history. Nepal had to be brought to a state of normalcy. But we must be united and we must learn how to live together. We must prevent people from taking advantage of this crisis to threaten our sovereignty, democracy and constitutional morality.”

2002: Nation in grief
Maoist rebels killed a Maoist activist in 2002 in Madanpur. The 1990 Constitution said 12,000 soldiers were killed in a Maoist attack in 2002 in Madanpur. A 1990 Constitution of Adarsh Koirala, one of the main casualties during the war. This exposed the army’s lack of preparedness and poor intelligence. Except from page 1 of #26, 24-30 February 2002.

2003: Spring in the heartland
Nepal was at war with India, and U.S. was watching the situation. A 1990 Constitution of Annapurna Devi on 4 March 2003: “We are all of us, the Maoists, the government, the people; we are all of us, we are the nation.”

2004: Bad blood in Benin
British journalist Thomas Jenkin was one of the five journalists who were killed in Benin. The 1990 Constitution said 12,000 soldiers were killed in a Maoist attack in 2002 in Madanpur. A 1990 Constitution of Adarsh Koirala, one of the main casualties during the war. This exposed the army’s lack of preparedness and poor intelligence. Except from page 1 of #26, 24-30 February 2002.

2005: The week that was
King Gyanendra’s surprise military coup against Sher Bahadur Deuba’s government, the new government, and brought heavy demotion of media. Pages of the Nepali Times could go to press after a two Royal Nepali Army officers read every word and expired extension. The paper was on the front page with what it has in the print. Except from page 1 of #26, 4-10 February 2005.

2006: Scrubbed
The scrapping of the People’s Movement surprised everyone, most of the aging parties. Gurunathendra Rijal's book on the Permanent Constitution on 4 April, 2006, and Purushottam Koirala's book on a Comprehensive Peace Accord, a 1990 Constitution of Annapurna Devi on 4 March 2003. The 1990 Constitution said 12,000 soldiers were killed in a Maoist attack in 2002 in Madanpur. A 1990 Constitution of Adarsh Koirala, one of the main casualties during the war. This exposed the army’s lack of preparedness and poor intelligence. Except from page 1 of #26, 4-10 February 2006.

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Times

2007: Still undecided

Two years after the earthquake, the page 1 story of “Times” had reported that 30% of the people surveyed were in favour of a new constitution, while 51% were against it. The remaining 19% of the respondents were undecided. The survey seemed to indicate that Nepal was ready for a political change, but the exact nature of this change was unclear. The government was still divided on the issue, with some ministers supporting a new constitution and others opposing it. The people of Nepal were waiting for a clear decision from their leaders.

2008: Changing of the guard

2008 proved to be a milestone year for Nepal as the newly elected parliament abolished the 20-year monarchy. On 7 March, King Gyanendra held a press conference at the Royal Palace and announced that he would abdicate his throne and vacate the palace on 20 May 2008.
2009: Unacceptable crime
In this interview after his party supporters killed the Himalayan office and assaulted staff, Home Minister Bimalendra Nath Deuba also criticized the attack, but did not apologize at all. One week before, press freedom in Nepal was reportedly threatened. The court imposed heavy fines and orders in the media companies.

2010: Jatra
The year was marked by political instability, fragile coalition, and a failure to make the peace process proceed. This page 1 illustration aptly depicts the great political uncertainty of the time. Excerpt from an accompanying article in issue #511, 24-30 September 2010.

2011: Staying aloof
Nepal did not receive a peace dividend after the peace process. People continued to mingle with security work in even large numbers. More fighting was going, 4-page photo showed children playing on an empty street that the bodies look. Except from #364, 29 July-4 August 2011.

2012: In the name of the father
Despite a unanimous 2011 Supreme Court ruling granting mother equal rights to access citizenship to their children as fathers, the government refused to sign. The father has changed over the years, with the latest one on file in the 2016 Citizenship Amendment bill fully attaining except from #32, 9 February 2012.

2013: The end of a sibling war
Jori Ra’s image capture by Sagar Shrestha. The end of a sibling war. Nepal was in the world. The sibling took part in the battle of Bhadrapur and Sankhu in opposite sides, and could have ended up killing each other. Nepal’s constitution won’t a civil war. It was a sibling war. After four years in the Bangladesh, Jori was among 1,372 former guerrillas included into the Nepal Army last month. Excerpt from the story in #352, 24-30 January 2014.

2014: Trepassing into nature
This investigation from Chhetri expands how the planned new airport in the Kailash and Sankhu highway would take through the Chhewargan park and cut the treacherous landscape. Following this report, the alignment of the airport was changed. Except from the story in #361, 26-30 September 2013.

The proposed route of the East-West Electric Railway and the Tinku Hill Railway will cut through Chhewargan Park, threatening salmon and the mous of the tiger and rams from the brink of extinction. A second draft proposal report (SWS) prepared by the Department of Railways and obtained by Himalayan Times shows various views have been prepared, all of which cut through the sanctity. One of the alignments shows digging two tunnels 1km and 7km long but has been abandoned because of cost.

2015: Shaking things up
In this edition from a twin earth quake, Nepal Times warned that the M7.9 earthquake was not the big one and that the real quake of an earthquake is to happen. As the nation marks five years of the Gorkha earthquake this April, it looks like we have been sort of waiting, warning; except from #356, 1-7 May 2015.
2016: The blockade that benefited no one except smugglers
Nepal saw over 200,000 jobs, Rafi’s sister double digits, post-earthquake reconstruction was delayed and the recovery was devastated by the Indian blockade. (Source: a report in #975, 2-14 February 2016 after the five-month blockade had been lifted) Now that the blockade has been lifted, it is important to ask who benefited from this five-month siege of landlocked Nepal? (Source: a report on #975, 2-14 February 2016)
2017: Into a state of uncertain stability
This story analyses the 2017 elections that brought the new ad pvocates party into government. (Source: a report from #981, 6-14 December 2017)

2018: Kleptocrats in Kuala Lumpur and Kathmandu
A cross-border investigative piece revealed the collusion between politicians and businessmen in Malaysia and Nepal to test migrant workers. (Source: a report in #979, 20-26 July 2018)

2019: Terrifying assessment of Himalayan melting
A review of the CMIC report that showed the impact of climate emergency on the Himalayas is a wake-up call. (Source: a report from #956, 14-21 February 2019)

2020: Which way Nepali politics in 2020?
Just two months into the new year, there is instability again as Prime Minister KP Oli and Pushpa Kamal Dahal struggle for supremacy. (Source: a report from #990, 21 January 2019 - 2 January 2020)
Ms Yak & Yeti

On any given day, General Manager Manika Schleibnauer can be seen making her way over the polished wood floors of the Yak & Yeti Hotel, her smile gracious and the air of her speech work recognized as German. Schleibnauer is the first woman general manager of the hotel located at Durbar Marg and the only woman general manager at a five-star hotel in Kathmandu Valley at the moment. Before she came to Nepal in 2017, she managed hotels in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, Thailand, Malaysia, and Bahrain.

“It has been more than two years that I have worked in this organisation and feel at home, with an overall sense of warmth and belonging,” says Schleibnauer, who says she had always wanted to visit Nepal. “I have made wonderful memories here that will stay with me forever.”

Although Schleibnauer had expected to visit, she had never imagined that she may one day live and work in Nepal. “I was never on my bucket list,” she admits. Upon her arrival, Schleibnauer has been fascinated by the country’s rich heritage, cultural diversity, array of cuisine, age-old festivals and kind people.

“Schleibnauer encourages young women to join the hospitality industry of higher managerial positions.”

“I feel we are living in a constantly changing world and it is empowering that women are given opportunities and tasks similar to, if not more, than men. It’s a constant learning experience,” she says. “Women tend to have high emotional intelligence, which is extremely important in the hotel industry where people serve people.”

In her two years at Yak & Yeti Schleibnauer has overseen the restoration of La Durbar, the re-launch of The Chimney, the hotel’s onsite restaurant, and the establishment of Spice Room, a fine-dining Indian restaurant. The open-air, La Durbar, built by Sir Shumsher Jung in 1885, was turned into Nepal’s first hotel for international tourism. The hotel opened in 1937 and now comprises one of Yak & Yeti’s two wings. Its distinctive facade has been faithfully preserved. The red marble used originally was originally supplied by India and carried by a team of mules to Kathmandu and the building now houses the hotel’s conference facility.

The new Spice Room serves an array of elevated north and south Indian dishes. The Chimney, far its part, is 105-years-old and houses a 60-year-old copper chimney. The restaurant transformed itself as a fine-dining restaurant in 2018 and continues to serve such dishes as Islamic biryani and中关村. Julia Zlatkovic, when he established the restaurant and for which it has been known.

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Sanghamitra Subba

In many parts of the world, women ambassadors can face prejudice that their male counterparts do not. Women diplomats, especially those with young children, are not expected to occupy senior positions. But female envoys to Nepal take this in stride, and appreciate the importance of their presence in challenging those assumptions.

“It is interesting to have a conversation with people before they form an opinion about me based on my role,” says British envoy Nicola Pollitt, who often introduces herself by name and does not mention her ambassadorial title. “But it’s difficult to go for long without someone asking directly what I do and they are often surprised when I tell them – particularly if I am with my two young children at the time.”

Out of 27 ambassadors currently resident in Kathmandu, seven are women. The envoys of Bangladesh, Brazil, China, the European Union, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. The UN resident coordinator is also a woman.

The first woman ambassador to Nepal was American diplomat Carol C. Leise, who held the position for seven years from 1966 to 1973, while her husband Elliott Bunker was the US ambassador to South Vietnam. Leise was the only female ambassador in Nepal at that time.

“I’ve experienced only positive reactions, very warm and welcoming. Nepali women are very happy to see women ambassadors and are encouraged by it,” Swiss envoy to Nepal Elizabeth von Capeller said.

Capeller told Nepal Times: “For many, women ambassadors are role models.”

Pollitt is the first female British ambassador to Nepal, and adds that in many countries it is easier to accept women from outside the country in positions of power than to break down the barriers to empowering women at home.

She says “Nepal is an open society and I have been welcomed here without prejudice. Many Nepalis are hopeful that as women in their country and the EU and other countries.”

In her second term as the Swiss ambassador, von Capeller has seen significant changes in the status of Nepali women. She says: “The biggest and most positive change I see is in the younger women. Compared with the past, their self-confidence has increased substantially. Among many factors, education has clearly contributed to it.”

There is a greater gender disparity in politics and diplomatic services than in other professional fields. According to the 2018 report “Women in Politics” by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women, only nine countries have half or more ministerial positions occupied by women, and in only three countries are 50% or more parliamentary seats occupied by women.

Nepal ranked 36th in the world by percentage of women in parliament and a low 123rd in terms of women in ministerial positions. As for women in the foreign service, there has been a slow but significant increase. Three of the Government of Nepal’s current ambassadors are women: those to Oman, Japan and Saudi Arabia.

For International Women’s Day on Sunday, British envoy Nicola Pollitt has a hope: “I wish women all over Nepal the courage, strength and determination to take opportunities and fulfill their potential. Without your active participation, Nepal will not fulfill its potential.”

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SO DO WE!
Forgotten woman who sheltered communist activists

During the days of absolute monarchy, Nepal’s communists were underground and organizing their party. Many people risked their lives to provide shelter for them. One of them was Balkumari Thapa of Nawa of Makawanpur district, where a landmark meeting of the Communist Party of Nepal (CPN) under the chairmanship of CP Maoist, was held during the 1989 pro-democracy movement. The first meetings of the All Nepal Women’s Association, the women’s wing of the CPN, were also conducted in Thapa’s home. Her sister Prativa, founding member of the association, said “She let us use her home at great personal risk to organize.”

In 1979 the police killed 18 people in a safe house used by communists in Thapaha, and Thapa was aware that something similar might happen in her house. So she deployed her five sons to keep a look out whenever party leaders met there. And when they spent the night, she herself stayed awake on duty duty. It all started when Thapa had to take her sick son to hospital in 1964. She had to break her journey at the house of Naim Viswa Rijbewal, an underground communist party cadre who was an all-time activist. He converted Thapa to communism, explaining its terms of the imperative to remove exploitation and to fight for equality and justice.

Now 83, Khakhwa recalls, “I went to Balkumari’s house after school one Friday, called everyone nearby, and taught dances in communist theory.” Balkumari’s husband Tik Bahadur Thapa was an anti-malaria health worker, and was not interested in politics. With all the party workers who had to be fed, the Thapas ran out of food, and she had to turn to the money to buy more provisions. “There was no way of knowing how many people would drop in. Sometimes there would be five or six at home, so I borrowed rice, flour, and other essentials from the neighbours,” Thapa recalls.

In 1979, Thapa became a Female Community Health Volunteer and that made it easier for her to travel and mobilize without raising suspicion. By 1981, she had become an active party member and her job included safe keeping and delivering party documents, organizing women, and moving classes.

GIMME SHELTER: Balkumari Thapa at home in Nawa of Makawanpur, where she gave shelter to many of Nepal’s current day communist leaders when they were waging an underground struggle.

Vijaya Sigdel, whom Thapa taught, is currently the chairperson of NLF Makawanpur. He remembers, “The party was more important to her than her own family.” Thapa was arrested and detained for a day in March 1988 for staging a government ban on celebrating Women’s Day. She has since held key positions in the All Nepal Women’s Association and currently holds an executive position within the Nepal Communist Party.

Only after the ban as political parties were lifted in 1988 did Thapa no longer have to offer a secure safe house anymore. After that, everyone talked about her selfless devotion to the party. After Thapa’s talk in 2021, the government did arrange for a pilgrimage to Gokarna (holy site) of Nepal, and the locals also provided her with financial support.

Mulkadir Koirala of the NLF in Makawanpur is critical of the party for forgetting Thapa’s selflessness. He says: “Those who sheltered are now in power, but they have forgotten the people who put them where they are now.”

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