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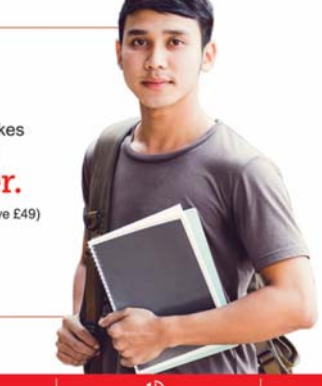



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BIKRAM RA

CONTAGION

Nepal's migration and tourism-based economy is being severely impacted as business grinds halt globally due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nepal expects about 250 climbers from 24 expeditions on Mt Everest this spring, even though Korean, Japanese and some western expeditions have cancelled. This is half down from last year, when there was a notorious traffic jam on the summit. On Wednesday, China closed its side of the mountain due to the COVID-19 scare.

“Everest expeditions are starting soon but we are still trying to figure out what to do if the mountaineers catch coronavirus during the trip,” says Sarita Lama of the Trekking Agencies’ Association of Nepal (TAAN). “This is so bad it may take us years to recover from

the crisis." Trek bookings are also at half of last year's numbers.

On Wednesday, the government suspended on-arrival visas for nationals of Germany, Spain and France in addition to previously announced Italy, China, Iran and South Korea -- countries with top arrival figures. Nationals of these countries can still come provided they apply for a visa beforehand and carry a health certificate.

Airlines have cancelled flights at peak tourist season, and bookings at 5-star hotels in Kathmandu are down 60%, with an 80% decline in visitors from China.

Former CEO of Nepal Tourism Board Deepak Raj Joshi notes: "The tourism industry is very sensitive. The smallest problem has widespread

impact, and it takes a lot of time to recover. We need to start preparing for the future right away.”

Nepal's main source of foreign exchange, its 2 million workers abroad, will also be hit. Qatar this week imposed a ban on workers from 15 countries, including Nepal. Nepal is preventing workers from flying to South Korea.

“The situation around the world is getting out of hand, but Nepal has been able to dodge a full-blown health crisis till now,” says Sameer M Dixit, a scientist at the Centre for Molecular Dynamics Nepal. “In an ideal situation the country would be under lockdown, but right now Nepal should stop all direct flights from highly affected countries.”

An Asian Development Bank report this week lays out the best- and worst-case scenarios for countries in the region. For Nepal, the bank predicts a loss of up to \$322 million due to impact on migration and tourism.

All major infrastructure projects face delays because of the reliance on Chinese contractors and workers. "Even if one Chinese engineer is absent, or if one critical piece of equipment does not arrive from China, work stops," says the president of the Independent Power Producers' Association Shailendra Guragain. "If the situation worsens, we may be seeing losses amounting to a billion dollars in our projects."

Sanghamitra Subba

- **International events cancelled**

PAGE 12-13

■ Crossborder virus and Nepali migrant workers

■ The other global pandemic: road fatalities

PAGE 14-15

■ Economy takes direct hit

PAGE 14-15

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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

Fear goes viral

The COVID-19 pandemic is subsiding in China where it originated, and is now erupting in clusters across the world. First carried by international travellers (mainly new-year holiday makers from China in January-February), it spread through public places. Interestingly, pilgrimage sites like Qom in Iran, a little-known evangelical megachurch in Daegu in Korea, churches in northern Italy, and a synagogue New York were epicenters of local outbreaks.

A virus is a strand of genetic material that can infiltrate cell nuclei, splicing itself into the DNA of the host and commanding the organism to be its vehicle for transmission. Being a mutant, COVID-19 is one step ahead of genetically engineered vaccines, and is so smart that it piggy-backs on the mobility of human beings to spread across the world.



The virus has figured out that it does not make sense to make the humans it infects so sick that they cannot travel – this would defeat the purpose of maximum dissemination. COVID-19 patients can be carriers despite not showing any outward signs of being infected. Even if they have a sore throat or a cough, they are not bed-ridden and commute to work or travel on business, spreading the virus along the way.

The virus' mode of transmission is also designed for maximum effect. After leaping the animal-human barrier, it took the easiest path for human-to-human infection by entering the respiratory tract through touch or cough droplets. The virus likes the cold, which is why it spread so quickly during the northern hemisphere winter.

Now that the epidemic has gone global, nationality profiling at airports is absurd. On Monday, police at Nagdhunga stopped buses and asked if there were any Chinese on board. Removing visa on arrival for travelers from 'infected countries' does not make sense anymore – you either go whole hog and stop all outsider travel altogether, like Bhutan has done, or you let everyone in after screening.

In fact, for all we know Nepal is already an 'infected country', we just have not bothered to diagnose anyone. Nepal's officials appear to believe in a vaccine called 'Pashupatinath', and expect the protector deity to see us through this crisis. Who knows, it may be our lackadaisical attitude towards personal hygiene, sanitation and waste management

that has given Nepalis a certain immunity against viral infections.

Scientist Sameer Mani Dixit at the Central for Molecular Dynamics calls this the 'hygiene hypothesis' – by allowing germs to be present, we develop an immunity to viral and bacterial infections, just as we would through the use of a vaccine. He says it was a "pure miracle" that the 2012 MERS epidemic did not affect Nepal in a big way (*page 14-15*).

The coronavirus epidemic adds to the burden of older existing infections that afflict Nepalis, and takes attention away from bigger bacterial killers like TB, typhoid and diarrhoea, vector-borne eukaryote parasites like malaria, or other insect-borne viruses like dengue and encephalitis. A public health system already overstretched to deal with these chronic epidemics is not at all prepared for another virulent onslaught.

However, we cannot expect faith or lack of sanitation to save us. Nepal is now linked to the global economy, and as such this worldwide epidemic

Nepali officials appear to believe in a vaccine called 'Pashupatinath', and expect the protector deity to see us through the coronavirus epidemic.

has hit two of the mainstays of our economy: migration and tourism, which together account for nearly 40% of the GDP.

As Upasana Khadka shows in her column (*page 14-15*), Nepal is paying a price for such an overwhelming reliance on labour migration. The moratorium on migrant workers flying to Korea and Qatar is a gut punch to Nepal's economy. Furthermore, Nepali workers already in the Gulf, Malaysia and Korea-Japan are affected by the global economic slowdown currently underway.

And the COVID-19 scare hit Nepal right at the start of the Visit Nepal 2020, which means the country will not meet the already unrealistic target of bringing two million tourists this year with an ill-planned campaign. March arrivals, except for Chinese tourists, were still all right, but there have been massive cancellations of treks and expeditions for April. As our reports (*pages 1, 14-15*) shows, the impact on employment and income for service providers in hospitality and farmers dependent on selling produce to hotels is huge. VNY2020 has already been put off, and the government has taken the welcome step of using the budget to improve tourism infrastructure.

Despite fear going more viral than the epidemic itself, there are some positive outcomes from COVID-19. Nepal's hospitality industry has once more recognised the importance of domestic tourism. China's recognition of the animal-transmission route may actually help save endangered species like pangolins from extinction. Oil prices have come down, and the global economic downturn has reduced air pollution and carbon emissions.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

In an editorial 10 years ago this week, we wrote about the dwindling constitution writing process and the political instability that was paralysing decision-making. This time around, we are experiencing the same conundrum, but the culprit is the COVID-19 pandemic. "We are all waiting to see what happens next."
Excerpt from Issue #493 12-18 March 2010

Nearly four years into the ceasefire, Nepal's peace process is stuck. Constitution-writing has ground to a halt. There seems to be a real danger of democratic reversal and backsliding. The political stalemate has brought about a state of national paralysis. Everything is on hold, and we're all waiting to see what happens next. The economy is stagnant, the country is literally in darkness. Lawlessness and crime have got worse, journalists are self-censoring and corruption doesn't even make the news anymore. The republic is on autopilot.



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ONLINE PACKAGES



Chardonnay pairs well with salmon, Pinot Noir with spaghetti bolognese and Merlot with roast pork. But what type of wine goes with classic Nepali dishes like momo, dal bhat, and sekuwa? We spoke to a sommelier to find out.
Story: *page 8-9*



Designer Mishu Shrestha studied fashion in Milan and started her own clothing brand, Mishus. Her new line, Denim Cashmere Collection, features sleek designs for the modern woman using ethically sourced fabric. Shrestha speaks on camera about having her pieces worn at the Cannes Film Festival, making clothes with sustainable materials and designing couture gowns.
Story: *page 4*

NEWSWOMEN

Kudos ('Newswomen,' Editorial, #1000)! But I believe *Nepali Times* was providing women opportunities way before it became "fashionable" to do so.

Himali Upadhya

■ Wow! Way to go

Lisa Mukhia Pretet

LIVING GODDESS

Wow ('A goddess among people,' Shristi Karki, #1000)! So interesting to read how fondly she recalls those years.

Holly Doel-Mackaway

TRAIL RUNNER

Mira Rai, ('Trail blazing trail-runner,' Sanghamitra Subba, #1000) you keep our national flag flying high with dignity.

Krishna Thapa

■ Mira Rai, you are one of a fantastic athlete, one that Nepal is so proud of. Hats off!

Renu Shrestha

ONWARD

Enjoyed going back down memory lane reading Manjushree Thapa ('Onward,' Majushree Thapa, #1000). She was so determined and struggled to learn Nepali while writing her column for *Nepali Times*.

Rita Thapa

MEDIA SURVEY

I really enjoy how Sharecast Initiative not only provides statistics, but also analyses of the data ('Mobile Nepal is hooked on Youtube,' Kunda Dixit, #1000). Really helpful.

Sabita Dangol

■ This new development needs to be harnessed to economic, as well as to social and cultural ends - amazing potential source of knowledge and information to support sustainable economic development

Pigreen

■ Data and Internet should be cheaper. Bandwidth need to be increased.

Basanta Raj Onta

20 REVIEWS

What a fantastic selection of books ('20 reviews in 20 years,' Nepali Times, #1000)! Will be adding these to my reading list.

Kiran Tuladhar

FEMALE GUIDES

These women ('Female guides juggle work and home,' Sushma Barali, #1000) are great role models for outdoor professionals.

Ghana S Gurung

WHAT'S TRENDING



Newswomen

Editorial
The five newswomen of *Nepali Times* share their experiences of working in the media industry. Visit nepaltimes.com to see what they have to say on the paper's 1,000th edition last week.

Most reached and shared on Facebook



A goddess among people

by Shristi Karki
Ex-Kumari Preeti Shakya was just three and a half years old and starting her tenure as the living goddess when Nepali Times first wrote about her in 2001. We caught up with Shakya to find out what the former goddess has been up to since then.

Most visited online page



1,000 weeks of Nepali Times

by Mark Turin
Last week *Nepali Times* kicked off celebrations for its 1,000th print issue online with an interview. Mark Turin and editor Kunda Dixit spoke about how the weekly has covered underreported issues and extensively explored significant political moments and discussed the paper's future.

Most commented

From Kamlari to MP

by Alisha Sijapati
At the age of eight, Shanta Chaudhary was leased to a landowner for Rs7000. Now, she is a member of parliament, a cancer survivor and an author. Read about her struggles and her fight against modern-day slavery in Nepal.

Most popular on Twitter

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Nepali Times marks its 1000 weeks on Friday. Kicking off #1000Times is @markturin in an interview with editor @kundadixit. The duo speak of times the weekly played a decisive role in exploring an important political moment or covering an underreported issue.

DFID Nepal @DFIDNepal
Congratulations to you @kundadixit and the Nepali Times team for such excellent reporting for all these years. Here's to the next 1000 issues!

Suraj @suraj86
Congratulations Nepali Times. Back in 2001, when I was a young lad just out of college, I spent my precious 20/25 bucks to buy this weekly. And I read every word. I absolutely loved it!! Your high quality inclusive journalism truly deserves applause. Thank you very much!!

Rustam Vania @rustamvania
Congratulations. Bright, Sharp and Fun as ever.

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SUPRAN PRADHAN



MISHUS



Let us introduce you to Nepal's Mishu Shrestha and you can hear her talk about the fashion business in Nepal and the hurdles she had to cross to establish her brand. "The challenges are a given," she says, "What is important is how you surmount them."

[nepalitimes.com](#)

Hurdles come with the terrain in Nepal's fashion industry

Mishu Shrestha has worked hard to create a fashion brand that is going places

Nepal's fashion industry survives mainly because of designers' passion for their work. Though there are some who have created a niche for themselves, most struggle to promote their brands even within the country. Sales on the international market are yet to happen even on a modest scale.



MADE IN NEPAL
Naresh Newar

No matter how great the designs, success comes down to turning art into apparel that is marketable. And there are many hurdles to making that happen in Nepal. High-quality clothes need high-quality fabric, which in turn requires the right raw materials. Silk, cotton, cashmere, wool, and leather all have to be imported from India, China and Bangladesh, and this drives up costs in a price-conscious Nepali market.

Despite being blessed with wide climatic variation, Nepal has yet to produce its own silk in Pokhara and Syangja, where there is potential for its cultivation. Cotton can grow well across the Tarai and lower midhills, but we have not even scratched the surface of making that happen. There has been an increase in the production of hemp fabric, but this is not suitable for a wide range of clothing.

"These challenges are a given

in Nepal, but we must persevere despite them, and our passion keeps us going," says Mishu Shrestha, a 48-year-old fashion designer who founded MISHUS fashion house in Kathmandu in 2012 after getting her diploma from Milan. (Pictured above, right)

The same year, Shrestha held her first fashion show, 'Mishus Couture', with 50 models from across the country. In doing so, however, she realised that in Nepal a fashion show is just a show and offers no business-to-business uptake, unlike elsewhere in the world, where prospective buyers come to place orders.

It is no wonder that fashion shows in Nepal are not an attraction anymore, but designers like Shrestha want to revive shows to rejuvenate the garment and apparel industry. That will create job and business opportunities, increase exports and market Nepal's culture through designs based on Nepal's indigenous clothing traditions.

"I really feel there is a market out there for Nepali apparel, and it is high time we designers collaborated to share creative ideas not just for designs but also for markets, and finding access to the important international buyers," says Shrestha, who has started doing just that.

Shrestha uses Mithila art and Tamang prayer flags in with her western apparel designs. She produces mostly cashmere gowns. That was what she wore during

the Cannes Film Festival in 2018, where she was the first Nepali ever to be invited. She attended with three designers from France, Kenya and India and each showcased their work as part of a show called 'Seven Continents of Fashion'.

"It was a very proud moment for me, to represent my country," recalls Shrestha, who created a sensation with her model, Anjali Lama, who is also a big name in India as Lakme Fashion Week's first transgender model. Lama is now brand ambassador for Levi's, Calvin Klein and Puma.

Shrestha's designer gowns were also worn by celebrities and at beauty pageants during the Cannes festival. She recently designed for Slovenian model and Hollywood actress Katianna Ley. A major breakthrough has been to team up with Indonesia-based Asia Pacific Rayon (APR) to produce a sustainable denim and cashmere collection.

APR sends the denim fabric to Nepal and Shrestha manufactures and exports the clothing internationally. She says fashion is hard work, and it has a social and environmental side to it.

"It is not all glitter and glamour, as many people think," says Shrestha. "We want to create employment opportunities from raw material production to high quality tailoring, producing quality clothes and also exporting across the world." 🇳🇵

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Qatar Airways

Qatar Airways has launched a new commercial policy to provide customers with maximum flexibility in their travel plans. Passengers that have booked or will



book flights for travel up to 30 June 2020 will be offered the flexibility to change their travel plans free of charge by altering the dates of their booking or exchanging tickets for a travel voucher valid for one year.

Turkish Airlines



Turkish Airlines is set to launch three flights per week from Istanbul to Vancouver. The flights will start on 9 June.

Samsung

Samsung Electronics unveiled the Galaxy A71 and Galaxy A51, the latest additions to the Galaxy A series. Built to bring meaningful innovations and better mobile experience to users. The A71 and A51 are

packed with enhanced features: longer-lasting batteries, smarter cameras and edge-to-edge Infinity-O displays.

Coca-Cola

As part of its commitment to empowering women in the workplace and beyond, Coca-Cola has been imparting the Shopkeeper Training and Resources 'STAR' Program. This global initiative aims to



economically empower 5 million women across Coca-Cola's value chain by 2020. Nepali women will get skills, techniques and tools required to succeed in retail, focusing on four key management areas: shop, stock, customer and financial.

Hyundai Golf

Superintendent of Police Ashok Singh won the Hyundai Open Golf Tournament at the Gokarna Golf Club. South Korean Ambassador Park Young Sik, The Chairman of Laxmi Group Ganesh Bahadur Shrestha, General Manager of Hyundai Motors Company Asia Pacific Regional Headquarter JH Shoi, Hyundai Deputy General Manager Jiho Son, and President of Gokarna Golf Club Suhrid Ghimire gave away the prizes.

prabhu BANK

Reincarnation of old phones in Nepal

SabKo Phone seeks to kickstart a movement in sustainability by giving old mobiles a second chance

Shristi Karki

Many Nepalis are worried about growing consumerism and throw-away culture, but most shrug and move on because they think one person cannot change the world. But not Shubu Tewari and Uttam Kaphle. Both were working in the development sector, and felt they should do something concrete to prove that sustainability made business sense. They could make a difference by shedding their indifference.

Unlike a linear economy which begins in extraction and ends in disposal, the circular economy keeps materials in use for as long as possible, making maximum use of them and minimising resource extraction and waste. Tewari and Kaphle studied models for a circular economy that would work in the Nepal business context.

Tewari and Kaphle zeroed in on e-waste, researched the mobile phone market and customer behaviour, and set up Sabko Phone. They were shocked to find out that Nepal officially imports 6 million cell phones a year valued at Rs 24billion. So, they decided to focus on repairing and refurbishing phones. In April 2019, SabKo Phone was born.

Sitting in a sunny corner of their bright, airy office in Sanepa, Tewari and Kaphle explain that most Nepalis seek a phone upgrade



SHRISTI KARKI

every 15 months. They found that 40% of old phones were just lying around the house unused, and could be refurbished.

“This is a sector in which there are a lot of problems, but that also means that there are many solutions to be found,” explains Tewari. “If only 5% of the demand for new phones switched to refurbished phones, the country could save

more than Rs1 billion a year.”

SabKo Phone offers phone repairs within three days, and refurbishes old phones in a week or so. The company also buys phones from people, and have prices for 300 models on its data base. If potential customers are satisfied with the price, they can book an appointment via the website, or just visit the store. Phones left with

SabKo Phone are worked on by two full-time technicians and when clients get their phones back or buy refurbished ones with warranty.

While beating the planned obsolescence of mobile phones, refurbishing also ensures that gold, cobalt, and other hazardous materials in e-waste can be mined and sold so they do not contaminate landfill sites.

“We might not be able to change everything, but we want to at least try to mitigate the problem,” says Tewari. “The fewer new smartphones brought on to the market, the lighter the economic and ecological burden.”

SabKo Phone’s sustainability practice extends beyond phone repair and refurbishing. Tewari and Kaphle are researching alternative uses for phone parts that cannot be reused in phones. The company sells its phones in boxes of made of recycled Nepali paper, and most of the furniture in SabKo Phone’s office is reused or repurposed. The company calculates its carbon footprint and at the end of each working year, and workd with Wildlife Conservation Nepal to neutralise it.

“If there is one thing that we figured out, it is that people do not want to throw away their phones and have them go to waste,” Tewari says, “There are very few people who say that they would rather throw their phones away than sell them.”

There are other environmentally sustainable business practices in Nepal like Fashion Revolution, and Tewari hopes others will join in creating non-waste ventures in the electronics sector as SabKo phone itself expands. “It is not like we are welcoming competitors, but we also are,” she says. “We want others to join us and be a part of this movement.” 🇳🇵



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Enjoy Responsibly

Remembering Des-la at Shangri~la

1,000 recollections of Desmond Doig at the hotel's Shambala Garden that he designed in Kathmandu

As befits a celebration in the time of coronavirus, the party in the Shangri~la Hotel's Shambala garden is muted. Hugs and handshakes are replaced with knuckle taps, elbow embraces and even jazz hands, but I prefer the good old namaste. Numbers are limited to just a few key staff and contributors gathering on the lawn in the unseasonal afternoon chill.



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

"Oh no, I even forgot to invite my sister!" groaned Kunda Dixit our host, clasping a large bunch of chrysanthemums presented by a guest to honour the twentieth year and one thousandth issue of the *Nepali Times*.

Kunda was in a reflective mood, and not just about contagion and the longevity of the newspaper. "Being here in the Shangri~la garden reminds me of Desmond Doig who was pivotal to my early career. Desmond's letter of recommendation got me accepted into Columbia – so kind of him, as he didn't really know me much, but that was his way."

Forty years ago, owner Shyam Bahadur Panday cleverly charged Desmond with the task of building the perfect Kathmandu hotel. Embarking late in life on a career as architect and landscape gardener, the Shangri~la is a living tribute to Desmond's skill, style, taste and, along with the Malla Hotel, the culmination of his talents. Celebrated as a writer and artist, 'Des-la' had retired to his 'emerald valley' of Kathmandu from a lifetime of journalism in Calcutta.

Dubby Bhagat, Robert Powell and Chino Ronchoroni all made special contributions to mould the Shangri~la over the years, and many more designers and managers have come and gone. The Panday family, father and sons, maintained a watchful eye,



SEPIA MEMORIES: Sir Edmund Hillary's signed photo hangs in a third floor corridor with Elizabeth Hawley and Boris Lisanevitch poring over Desmond Doig's Shangri~la Hotel plans in 1979. Doig is at far-left.

Desmond Doig (*right*) was a renaissance man and died in 1983 while working on Shanri~la Pokhara.

The Shangri~la's Shambala Garden still exudes tranquility and elegance.

and are now expanding beyond Pokhara into Begnas and Chitwan. But the enduring spirit of the hotel, firmly imprinted at its inception by Desmond Doig's sure hand, is still with us today.

I glance around the terraces and fountains in the gathering March twilight, a haven of tranquillity remarkably little changed over the years. It does not seem four decades ago that Desmond Doig was striding through the Shangri~la building site, clipboard in hand, pointing imperiously, and issuing strings of instructions to the attentive acolytes in his wake.

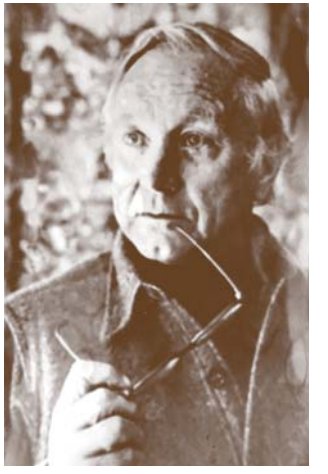
Utpal Sengupta, the curly haired member of his original entourage, carried on the legacy and ran the Hotel with flair and imagination for 20 years since its opening on 1 July 1979. Desmond hosted Utpal's marriage to Caroline amidst the marigolds, one of the first of many remarkable events in that soothing

oasis of a garden.

Desmond's 'Shang' was a fixture for many of us local expats. Linger in the al fresco café, lounging at the *hiti* pool, or enjoying a hot rum punch by the roaring fire in the lobby bar, one might have run into Tony Hagen the Swiss development pioneer who walked the length of Nepal, Dudley Spain long-term British Embassy implant, UNICEF's Gordon 'Golden' Temple before he decamped to Bhutan, Jim Edwards the indefatigable owner of Tiger Mountain, or Col. Jimmy Roberts with his floppy-eared spaniels, the founder of trekking in Nepal.

The legendary Boris Lisanevitch regularly graced the kitchens as a special guest chef, bearing bones with which to make his famous borscht, and of course Des-la held my 30th birthday party there amidst the newly planted flowerbeds.

The *burra sahib* himself, Sir Edmund Hillary was feted at a garden dinner by a group of Sherpa friends to mark the Everest Golden Jubilee. Suites are named after him and Tenzing Norgay, and a photo hangs in a third floor corridor showing Sir Ed poring over Desmond's hotel drawings with Boris and Elizabeth. He and Lady June would have preferred the Shangri~la for the main 50th anniversary on 29 May 2003, but only the Hyatt could accommodate the thousand-plus mountaineers, dignitaries, friends,



media, well-wishers and hangers-on who turned up.

The Prime Minister attended the reception honouring the Himalayan chronicler, Elizabeth Hawley, with 35 years of service to Reuters. Kunda had survived as her youthful intern. Always a stickler for accuracy, to our embarrassment she kept interrupting the regional boss' laudatory speech with factual corrections. Ten years later in 2004, under an elegant white awning in a peaceful corner of the garden, Bernadette Vasseux and I hosted a small lunch to mark the New Zealand Queen's Medal that Elizabeth received after 20 years as Honorary Consul and mainstay of Sir Ed's Himalayan Trust.

Desmond could sometimes be prevailed upon to guest-escort tour groups, being especially susceptible to posh Brits with ancient titles. My favourite story was during a sightseeing of his beloved Kathmandu, the tour bus paused in the heart of the Durbar Square to admire the exquisite temple-scape. A fruity British voice boomed disapprovingly from the back seat: "Awful lot of people hanging around doing nothing."

Freya Stark, writer, Arabist explorer and eccentric, was one of the first to stay at the Shangri~la. Already in her 80s, and a little forgetful she declared vaguely "I feel we must be somewhere east of the Euphrates" as I helped her

check-in. We arranged two treks for her in the early 1980s, with her favourite hill pony named 'Red Balls'. She much admired the muscle-bound legs of the Nepali porters, and professed a desire to die in the Himalaya. Thankfully, she was not successful. On leaving Nepal for the last time, Dame Freya wrote in the Shangri~la guest book: 'This is the finest hotel I have ever stayed in with the nicest people in it.'

Desmond Doig left us in 1983 but he lives on in his gardens, in our memory, in his books and in his paintings which adorn the hotel walls. I was leading one of the first treks permitted in Tibet that October day when Desmond succumbed to a massive heart attack on the road from Pokhara.

I lit oil lamps for him, finding solace in the dim, musty prayer halls of all the surviving monasteries from Rongbuk to Lhasa, knowing how these powerful places would have appealed to him. My group of intrepid European clients included Roman Polanski. It was a stressful trip for me amidst the victim mentality and fragile egos, travelling together in an old truck grinding along the dusty tracks to the north side of Everest, perched precariously on our luggage, food supplies and heaps of camping equipment. Once back in Nepal, I relished introducing Roman to the American Ambassador. 🇳🇵

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Nepal Times.com

Om Astha Rai

The World Economic Forum’s annual list of Young Global Leaders (YGL) has featured very few Nepalis so far. The 2015 batch included Nepali Congress MP Gagan Thapa.

Others who have made it to the list include Aashmi Rana (2009), Ashutosh Tiwari (2011) and Tshering Lama (2015).

Now, Nepali youth and social activist Pradip Pariyar has surprisingly, but deservedly, found a place on the list for his contribution to social inclusion and peace-building involving Nepal’s youth. Pariyar is the executive chair of the Kathmandu-based non-profit Samata Foundation.

His inclusion puts Pariyar in the company of Jacinda Ardern, Mark Zuckerberg, Jack Ma, Chelsea Clinton, Farhan Akhtar and Viswanathan Anand. Many previous YGL title-holders are now running governments, heading international organisations and changing the world with innovative business ideas.

After making it onto the YGL list, a delighted Pariyar told the Nepali Times: “This is a very big moment not just for me, but also for my country and people.”

The road thus far has not been easy for 38-year-old Pariyar. Born to a Dalit family in Sindhuli district, he had to struggle against untouchability and caste discrimination from a very young age.

“Untouchability is as inhumane as apartheid, or even more so,” said Pariyar, who first experienced it as an innocent ninth grader. Every evening after school, he used to go for tuition to the house of a math teacher who was a Brahmin. The teacher would allow his non-Dalit

pupils to sit inside, but Pariyar was made to sit outside the door.

One evening, it started to rain, and the young Pradip got wet. The teacher saw him drenched and shivering outside, but still did not ask him to come in and sit with the others. Pariyar felt hurt and humiliated, and never went back to the teacher’s house again. “That sowed the first seeds of caste consciousness in my young mind, and defined my later activism,” says Pariyar.

Pariyar recalls the importance of his encounter with Dalit activist and politician Golchhe Sarki in the 1990s, who once created a sensation by throwing his shoes at Nepali Congress leader Ram

Chandra Poudel for the latter’s racist remarks.

Sarki had spent a night at Pariyar’s family home in Sindhuli during a political campaign. He had spoken with Pariyar’s father about caste, Dalits, untouchability and politics, and the young Pradip had listened attentively. He also understood why Sarki was staying with his family and not at the house of a non-Dalit communist cadre.

Pariyar came to Kathmandu for higher studies, and caste discrimination pursued him to the capital. He was hounded out of his rented room many times, and finally found a Muslim landlord who agreed to take him in.

Years of suffering

discrimination has forged Pariyar into a fierce social justice activist. He went on to produce radio programs, inspiring Dalits to share their stories of discrimination, exclusion and injustice.

He says Dalits and other excluded ethnicities still feel excluded by the Nepali state, and says: “The absence of violence does not mean there is peace.”

When the war ended in 2006, Pariyar travelled through the mid-western mountains, where he met many disoriented, disillusioned and hopeless youth. He realised it would not be possible to build peace without engaging the youth and igniting their minds. He founded Nepal Youth Forum,

and also served as chair of the Association of Youth Organisations Nepal (AYON).

Pariyar was also a member of the task forces that drafted Nepal’s first National Youth Policy, and the Youth Vision (2015-2025). He says one of the reasons why Nepal is being run the way it is today is because younger Nepalis have not been given the chance to formulate policy and govern.

He says: “Youth in all the parties have not been able to challenge 70-something top leaders, and instead of confronting them the young cadre are just waiting for their turn to get old and claim the posts. This does not bode well for our future”. 🇳🇵

Nepal’s new Davos man

Nepali activist Pradip Pariyar is part of World Economic Forum’s 2020 batch of Young Global Leaders



SANTU LAMA

On cloud wine

Alisha Sijapati

The moment Kelsang Dolker, 25, enters a liquor store, she feels overwhelmed by the varieties of imported wines displayed on the wall-to-wall shelves. All the different names and locations listed on the bottles can leave an amateur flummoxed. “Shiraz, Pinot Noir, Merlot, Syrah, what are these, even?” she asks.

Dolker used to just decide on red or white, pick something not too pricey and grab the bottle. But she started developing a taste for Merlots with their dry and smooth finish, and came back repeatedly to buy more of the same.

Ashank SJB Rana also knew little about the vast variety of wines before deciding to study it. It was because of the potential he saw for wine promotion in Nepal that he graduated in wine management from Hong Kong Polytechnic University. He is now

director of marketing at Vesper House, a wine cellar and restaurant in Jhamsikhel. Rana has seen a gradual shift in Vesper’s clientele, with more Nepali buyers nowadays than expats.

“It is natural for customers to be baffled, as wines are still a slow bloomer in the country. But consumers are catching up because they travel abroad and have exposure,” says Rana.

Vesper House currently imports hundreds of wines, including from Australia, Spain, Germany, Italy, and France. The Nepali company also has its own wine label appealing to a wide variety of pallets, from Chardonnay to Syrah to Cabernet Sauvignon. Nepali customers typically prefer Merlot and Chardonnay.

Vesper works with restaurants to advise them on their wine menus, and trains their waiters.

We asked Rana to list his ten most popular wine brands. See below. 🇳🇵



10 MOST POPULAR WINES



Costa Russi Barbaresco D.O.P,
Gaja 2014
Italy
Rs107,800

The 2014 Costa Russi is an amalgamation of berry fruits – strawberry, raspberry, mulberry and black cherry. It also holds floral and spicy notes of rose, green tea, chestnut honey and fresh hay. This wine is said to be precise and well balanced. It pairs well with red meat and pasta.



Oreno Toscana IGT, Tenuta Sette
Ponti 2014
Italy
Rs12,886

Orena Toscana is a Bordeaux blend. This 2014 wine is Tuscan red and passes a flavour of flowers, citrus fruit and currants. It has a polished aftertaste. This wine compliments full-flavoured meats, game and roasts.



Champagne Premiere Cuvee,
Bruno Paillard Champagne
France
Rs11,830

A combination of three grapes – Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Meunier – this French champagne opens with fresh brioche and toast flavours along with sweet cherries and strawberries. It has a bright straw-gold colour. It is slightly salty and any fish will go well with this drink.



Amarone della Valpolicella D.O.C.G,
Tedeschi 2014
Italy
Rs 8,000

Strong ruby-red in colour and clear and transparent, with notes of vanilla and an ethereal air, depending on the ageing period of the barrel. It leaves behind notes of sweet fruits. The wine is well balanced, with an enduring flavour. It is best served with red meat and cheese.



Bellavista Alma Cuvée Brut,
Franciacorta D.O.C.G
Italy
Rs5,720

Alma Cuvée has a white, bubbly and persistent mousse with bright yellow colour and luminous glints of green. The taste carries hints of sweet ripe fruit, meringue, pastries and candied citrus peel. Highly recommended with fish.



Which wine with momos?

French sommelier Antoine Garet has been based in Kathmandu for over a decade. Fluent in Nepali, he currently runs Lazimpat-based restaurant Vino Bistro, where he sells and offers over 300 varieties of wine. Although his restaurant does not serve Nepali cuisine, Garet has some ideas about pairing wine with Nepali food.

He maintains that pairing food and wine is all about pleasure, and how one does it will depend on the diner's pallet. "If the *dal bhat* you are eating is spicy, you would go for two glasses of cold water. It's similar with wine. You would want something fresh and light."

With momos, too, Garet generally prefers a light wine, maybe a Chardonnay, because it leaves a light and refreshing taste that will help dissolve the *momo's* strong flavours in between bites. He has a different take, however, on *sekuwa*s and seafood. "If you want to drink wine with your *sekuwa*, opt for a thick wine. It's all about balance, and why waste a good rich taste on something that doesn't complement it?" He also advises that prawn should not be eaten with red wine, as the chemicals don't work well together.



Chardonnay pairs well with salmon, Pinot Noir with spaghetti bolognese and Merlot with roast pork. But what type of wine goes with classic Nepali dishes like *momo*, *dal bhat*, and *sekuwa*? We spoke to sommelier Antoine Garet to find out.

nepalitimes.com

MONIKA DEUPALA

Pinot Noir, Framingham 2016 New Zealand Rs5,447

New Zealand's Pinot Noir is bright and displays a mid-garnet colour. The flavour of this Pinot Noir leaves a lasting taste of cherries and herbs. It pairs well with duck, salmon or other fatty fish, roasted chicken or pastas.



Sauvignon Blanc, Framingham 2017 New Zealand Rs4,164

The 2017, Sauvignon Blanc has a smoky, flinty aroma, notes of bitter lemon and grapefruit and suggestions of tropical fruit salad. It has a rich, slightly chewy palate with good mouthfeel. Goat cheese, green vegetables, fresh herbs, and delicate fish with citrus dressing are best suited for this pallet of wine.

Prosecco Treviso Silver D.O.C., Follador Italy Rs3,328

This wine has a bright yellow straw colour and leaves bubbles with delicate foam. The aromas are fruity and flowery, leaving a fresh, well structured and pleasant aftertaste. Best paired with starters, aperitifs and cocktails, fish and shellfish.



Vesper Cabernet Sauvignon, La Carraia Italy Rs2,223

Vesper Cabernet Sauvignon is produced by La Carraia winery, located near Bachi in central Italy. Brilliant ruby-red in colour with slight berry fruit on the nose. Full and ripe on the palate with balanced tannins. Recommended with a first course and with lightly grilled meat dishes.

Vesper Chardonnay, Fontana di papa Italy Rs1,658

This wine is straw yellow in color with golden hues and the bouquet is fruity, elegant and persistent. On the palate, it is fresh, round and balanced. It pairs well with starters and fish dishes.



EVENTS



Tinchuli Hike

Take a walk in mother nature. Nurture your mind, body, and soul on this meditation hike.
14th March, 6:45am-5:30pm, Price: Rs1500, Sooriya Wellness and Yoga Centre (01) 4001714

Guitar Workshop

The ninth session of the Guitar Science Workshop will include discussions by Tomás Carrasco on the flute, Moa Edmunds on electric acoustic guitar, and HariKunwar on the technical aspect of music.
14 March, 2pm-5pm, Guitar Shop, Nayabazar, 9848833537

Film Screening

The filmChasing Rainbows, directed by Sahara Sharma, is being screened as part of the FICSON Film Series organised by Film Critics Society Nepal.
19 March, 3pm-9pm, Martin Chautari, Thapathali



Farmers Market

Do your weekly shopping for fresh and healthy vegetables, fruit, cheese, bread, meat products, honey, and much more. Meet up with your friends and relax in the garden.
Every Saturday, 8am-12pm, Le Sherpa Maharajgunj

Canvas & Cocktail

Celebrate Women’s History month with canvas painting and a silent auction and listening to live music. You can take your painting home with you after you’re done.
14 March, 4pm-7pm, Tickets: Rs2500, Hotel Tibet International, Boudha

Poetry Evening

Join the community of poets by performing your original poetry on stage and listening to the recital of other poems at this open mic event.
13 March, 4pm-6:30pm, Kausi Cafe and Lounge, Lalitpur (01) 5186515

Board Game Night

Join the weekly board-game night. Play Smash Up, Carcassonne: Star Wars, Zombies!, Farkle and more. If you like, bring your own board games with you.
March 19, 6pm-9pm, Baked n’ Fresh, Jhamsikhel (01) 5904689



Meditation Workshop

Take time out of your busy schedule to calm your mind and increase your focus. Every Monday and Thursday, 8:30-9:15am, Bikalpa Art Center, Pulchowk (01) 5013524

MUSIC



Beatles Tribute

Join Ko Kaa as they pay tribute to The Beatles.
13 March, 5pm-10pm, Tito’s Pub and Lounge, Jhamsikhel, 9841647747

Rohit J. Chhetri

Spend a musical evening with Rohit John Chhetri.
13 March, 7pm onwards, EVOKE Cafe & Bistro, Jhamsikhel (01) 5532021

Trishna Gurung

Enjoy singer/ songwriter Trishna Gurung’s performance of her popular songs, including Khani Ho Yamu. Stay for the afterparty.
13 March, 7pm-3am, Tickets: Rs1000, Privé Nepal, Tahachal, 9801090111

Bluegrass Jam

A jam session from a group of Bluegrass musicians travelling with Music Art Adventures.
13 March, 4pm-6pm, HUB, Thamel, 9866273244



Prateek Kuhad

Prateek Kuhad, hailed by Rolling Stone India as one of the country’s leading singer-songwriters, is in Kathmandu as part of his global tour.
14 March, 3pm-9pm, Soaltee Crowne Plaza, Tahachal (01) 4273999

DINING

Thistle Triangle

The special Peri Peri wings or triple chicken feast or in fact any item from Thistle’s Eurasian menu is a great treat.
Matighar Mandala Bhawan, Matighar (01) 4101740



Saturday Barbecue

Spend the day with your loved ones and have some good barbecue.
14 March, 12pm onwards, The Chimney, Nepal, Thahity (01) 4248999

Kaiser Cafe

A quaint restaurant, with a nice menu and attentive service, hidden in a corner of the Garden of Dreams. Enjoy fine dining after a relaxing walk around the serene garden.
Kaiser Café, Thamel (01) 4413217



Cibo Bistro

If you’re heading to Cibo Bistro, be prepared to leave feeling full and happy. The restaurant’s carefully curated menu of pastas, pizzas, salads, appetizers and desserts will have you wanting each and every single dish.
10am-10pm, Pulchowk (01) 5541940

Blenders

Have a cold reusable bottle of milkshake at this new milkshake bar. Blenders’ exciting flavours and cute light-bulb shaped glass bottles will keep you coming back for more.
10am-9pm, City Centre, Kamal Pokhari, 9851219100

GETAWAY



Hotel Annapurna View

Situated at 1,600m atop Sarangkot, this boutique hotel offers breathtaking views of the snow-capped mountains and Phewa Lake. Catch a glimpse of the panoramic scene of the Annapurnas in the dining area.
Sarangkot, Pokhara (01) 443566

Mystic Mountain

Situated amid the forests of Nagarkot, this resort features ultra modern design and world-class comfort.
Nagarkot (01) 6200646

Aloft

Located Thamel’s Chhaya Devi Complex, Aloft, a global chain of hotels, offers some of the best modern luxuries and architecture in Kathmandu. From beauty salons and spas to restaurants and shops, Aloft is a place for visitors to indulge.
Thamel (01) 5252000

Maruni Sanctuary Lodge

Chitwan National Park is home to a wide range of flora and fauna. From the comfort of the cabins and cottages of this lodge, you can gaze at the wandering wildlife and nature of the park.
Sauraha (01) 4700632



Bandipur Kaushi Inn

A small, rustic place to stay in the idyllic village of Bandipur, replete with cultural diversity and traditional architecture.
Bandipur, Tanahu (065) 520083

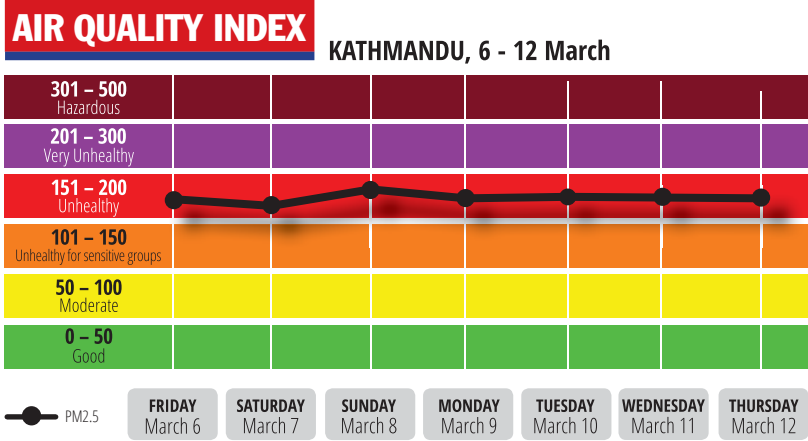
Going places together - qatarairways.com

After that pleasant week, we are headed smack into another westerly front that will bring rain and snow at higher altitudes over Nepal into Friday and Saturday. The system will pass quickly, though, and return the sun on Sunday. There will be a dip in the maximum temperature in Kathmandu, but the minima will climb to double digits for the first time this year. And it is going to get progressively warmer next week.

FRIDAY 23°
11°

SATURDAY 22°
10°

SUNDAY 22°
9°



This week has been relatively better in terms of the PM2.5 count in the Air Quality Index. But with the daily average hovering in the Red Zone ('Unhealthy') the concentration of particulates in the air we breathed was still eight times worse than the WHO standard. The air has been visibly clearer in the afternoons because a westerly breeze blew away the pollution. Check out live hourly AQI updates on the Nepali Times homepage, or visit:
<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI

KRIPA JOSHI

LIVE MORE LOCALLY

Human health is invariably linked to the health of the natural world. Globalised economies are precarious, as demonstrated by the recent virus outbreak. Localising our economies (by buying local produce, supporting local industries and travelling less) will mean reducing carbon-intensive global trade and building a resilience for an uncertain future. These measures, which tackle the ecological crisis, will also help to limit the spread of diseases.

OUR PICK

Opens in Kathmandu 13 March

Bloodshot is another action-packed superhero film from Vin Diesel, who last played Groot in Avengers: Endgame. Diesel plays the role of Ray Garrison, who was brought to life by a team of scientists after he and his wife were assassinated. Based on the Valiant Comics character of the same name, the movie is directed by David S F Wilson and the cast includes Eiza González, Sam Heughan, Toby Kebbell, and Guy Pearce.

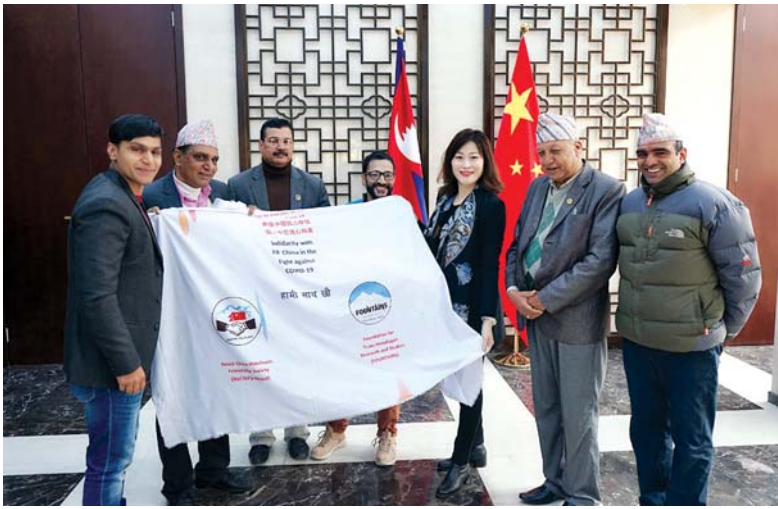
बालबालिका माथि हुने हिंसा, दुर्व्यवहार, शोषण भएको, जोखिमपूर्ण अवस्थामा रहेको वा बालअधिकारको उल्लंघन भएको छ भने बाल हेल्पलाइनको पैसा नलाग्ने

फोन: नं. १०९८ मा खबर गरौं ।

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सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग

I attend many events in Nepal where media professionals are present but I do not see many women. The few women journalists and TV presenters I have met are very vocal about their concerns and are determined in their career choice and what they wish to achieve. The EU supported the first women journalist mountaineers who scaled Everest two years ago. I was impressed by their ambition to get to the Summit, the hard training they undertook to prepare themselves for the challenge, and the determination and resilience they showed in achieving it – all skills that make for great journalism! Women journalists deserve to get to the top of their profession as well, and this would benefit all Nepali citizens.

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UNITED AGAINST VIRUS: Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Hou Yanqi receives a banner on Wednesday from Nepal-China Himalayan Friendship Society in solidarity with China in the fight against COVID-19.



ALL FOR ONE: Chairpersons of Rastriya Prajatantra Party (United) Pashupati SJB Rana and Prakash Chandra Lohani, and chair of Rastriya Prajatantra Party Kamal Thapa signed an agreement to unify their two parties on Tuesday.



CORONA HOLI: A woman Holi reveller wearing a mask and eye protection while enjoying Phagu Purnima festival on Monday in Kathmandu.



LENDING A HAND: Equipment to protect health workers from the coronavirus donated by USAID and WHO arrived in Kathmandu on Monday to be dispatched to hospitals.



ALL THAT GLITTERS: Miss World 2019 Toni-Ann Singh from Jamaica with Miss Nepal 2019 Anushka Shrestha at Kathmandu Airport on 6 March. Singh came for a three-day Beauty with a Purpose event with Shrestha.

Nepal postpones international events

International Film Festivals and cricket tournaments are at a standstill

Mahesh Shrestha

As fears about COVID-19 spread across the world, many countries have taken preventative measures by cancelling events and gatherings. Nepal is the latest to issue an appeal not to organise any large meetings, conferences, festivals, and any other events in view of the possible risk of a COVID-19 outbreak in the country.

Ease of visa process and travel make Kathmandu a popular destination for international and regional conferences, sporting events, film festivals and trade fairs.

But organisers of three major events slated for this month, from the film industry to sports, have agreed to postpone or cancel their long-awaited programs.

The first case of COVID-19 was detected in a Nepali student returning from China on 23 January but he was discharged after his condition improved. According to the Ministry of Health and Population, as of 6 March, 437 samples from patients were tested and 436 came out negative with



the one positive case having already recovered from the virus. By 8 March, 441 samples had been tested, all of which were negative.

While Nepal's infection numbers are still relatively low, the impact of the global COVID-19 outbreak is projected to have a

serious impact on the economy (see pages 1, 14-15). According to an ADB analysis, the outbreak will hit almost every sector of the Nepali economy, with many fearing that the country's GDP might shrink by 0.04-0.13%.

The 8th Nepal Human

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amidst COVID-19 fears



EMPTY STADIUM: Pokhara's scenic stadium where some of the Everest Premier League cricket matches were to be played. The tournament with famous international players was among other events postponed due to the COVID-19 scare.



to Nepal to participate in the festival. While the preparations and publicity of the festival were ongoing, the Center announced its postponement on 2 March until further notice.

In a press statement, Executive Director of Human Rights Film Center and Nepal Human Rights International Film Festival Director Pandav Khatri said: "HRFC will declare next date of the Festival once the situation is under control. The same films already selected for the festival will be screened on the next date too."

The Pokhara International Film Festival 2020, scheduled to begin on 14 March, has also been postponed until further notice. Organised every year in the tourist town of Pokhara, the fourth edition of the two-day festival was to be held from 14-15 March.

Thirty-five films from 22

countries were scheduled to be screened at the festival, and five international and eight Nepali filmmakers were coming to attend. Jitesh Pradhan, Chairperson of Pokhara Film Society said the new date would be declared as the situation comes under control.

In addition, the much-awaited Everest Premier League, the T20 cricket bonanza where famous international players were to participate, was also postponed.

Nepal's event, Sagarmatha Sambaad, scheduled for 2-4 April 2020 has also been postponed due to the possible risk of COVID-19. The government had planned the multi-stakeholder global dialogue on the topic of 'Climate Change, Mountains, and the Future of Humanity' focusing mainly on the impacts of climate change that Nepal and a number of other countries around the world are facing.

After the World Health Organization (WHO) listed Nepal as one of the countries at high risk for a novel coronavirus outbreak, the Foreign Ministry decided to postpone this international event where many politicians, university representatives, and international organisations were scheduled to participate.

Nepal has also decided to stop issuing on-arrival visas to foreign nationals from five countries badly affected by the COVID-19 outbreak, namely China, South Korea, Japan, Iran and Italy. On Wednesday, it added Germany, Spain and France on that list.

The government has also decided to screen travellers at 37 entry points along the Nepal-India border.  *Global Voices*

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Crossborder virus and Nepali

The COVID-19 epidemic has hit countries where millions of Nepalis work

Nepal's remittance-based economy has always been vulnerable to international upheavals like tension in West Asia, or economic downturn in Malaysia or Korea. An unexpected threat is the COVID-19 epidemic affecting countries where Nepali overseas workers are based.



The country with the second-largest burden of disease outside China is South Korea where there are about 40,000 Nepali workers. Of the 14 new cases of COVID-19 detected in the UAE this week, two were Nepalis. There are about 200,000 Nepali workers in the Emirates.

Qatar also has about 400,000 Nepali workers, and the country has now temporarily banned workers from Nepal and other countries. Qatar has so far detected 15 infected individuals. Cases have also been diagnosed in other West Asian countries with sizeable Nepali working populations: Bahrain (109), Kuwait (65), Oman (18) and Saudi Arabia (15).

Last week Kuwait imposed travel bans on Nepalis, and last week 30 Nepali workers en route to Bahrain were returned from the UAE to Nepal.

Public health experts say that



workers are vulnerable because just one asymptomatic carrier of coronavirus can spread it to other workers living in crowded dorms. Some years, up to 1,000 Nepali workers in the Gulf and Malaysia have died, and this grim

statistic could see an increase if the epidemic spreads.

“There is no evidence yet that COVID-19 is present in the work camps, but all it takes is one infected individual to spread it among others, so they would need

to be tested, and if they come out positive may have to be isolated,” says Sameer M Dixit, a scientist at the at the Centre for Molecular Dynamics Nepal. “Nepal itself may have infected people who are not diagnosed.”

MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome) is another coronavirus epidemic in West Asia which has killed 855 and infected 2,500 people in the past eight years. Adds Dixit: “It is a pure miracle that MERS did not end up affecting

The other global pandemic:

While attention is fixed on COVID-19, road traffic accidents are killing 3,500 people worldwide daily

Surendra Phuyal
in Stockholm

Nearly 2,800 people were killed on Nepal's roads in the past year: that averages at seven fatalities per day. No data is available for the number of people who suffer such accidents, but thousands are injured seriously enough to be disabled for life. Yet, this pandemic of road accidents gets much less media attention than COVID-19.

Actress and model Mahima Silwal was headed to Chitwan for her wedding along with her sister Sharmila on 12 February when their scooter was hit by a speeding bus. Mahima was pronounced dead at a nearby clinic. Her sister later died in a Kathmandu hospital.

On 26 February CPN-ML General Secretary C P Mainali and several of his family members were injured in a car crash near Bardibas. On 2 March, former Constituent Assembly member Dharma Prasad Ghimire was killed in a crash in Bagdogra of India.

News of bus crashes and traffic accidents do not even make it to the news line-up of the mainstream media anymore, unless they are celebrities. Yet the numbers killed on Nepal's roads in the past ten years exceeds the total 17,000 who died during the armed conflict. In fact, road traffic accidents ranked

as the number one cause of death among children between 5 and 14 years of age in Nepal.

“There has been a big expansion of new roads, but unfortunately highway infrastructure and road discipline enforcement have not kept pace. We need to work on implementation day-by-day,” Minister for Physical Infrastructure and Transport Basanta Kumar Nembang told *Nepali Times* in Stockholm while attending the Third Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety here.

Along with 140 countries attending the conference, Nepal committed to meeting the World Health Organisation (WHO) goal to halve the number of road fatalities by 2030. According to the WHO's own statistics, at least 7,000 people were killed worldwide during the two days of the conference – whereas the total known fatalities due to COVID-19 in the past two months was 4,635 as of Thursday.

The WHO was holding the Stockholm conference even while the coronavirus was spreading out of China to the rest of the world, but road traffic accidents have long been an endemic cause of mortality and morbidity the world over. WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in Stockholm that it was “an outrage” that so many people were dying on the world's roads every day.

“Most road traffic deaths and

injuries can be prevented, using tried and tested strategies, and everyone should be a part of the solution,” he told the gathering. But even as the conference came to a close on 20 February, the issue was already being eclipsed by the worldwide coverage of the COVID-19 spread.

Since then, there have been at least 150 deaths on Nepal's roads – mainly from overcrowded jeeps falling off poorly-built mountain roads, or buses overspeeding on highways lacking basic safety features like centreline guard-rails. In the cities, 90% of fatalities involve motorcyclists or pedestrians, indicating poor safety enforcement and low awareness.

WHO says the fatality rate is highest in low- and middle-income South Asian countries like Nepal, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Poor countries account for 93% of highway fatalities in the world.

The United Nations observed 2011-2020 as a Global Decade on Road Safety, proposing to stabilise road traffic deaths and injuries around the world. There were mixed results, with partial success in ensuring better legislation, safer roads and vehicles, mandatory use of helmets and seatbelts, and reduced speeds.

The International Road Assessment Programme is trying to raise awareness by rating roads by their safety records, and by



migrant workers



CONTAGION: The deserted streets of Gimpo near Seoul on Monday, in a picture taken by a Nepali worker.

detected, and 50 deaths so far, but the Korean public health system has made sure that the disease is contained, and Nepalis there say they feel safe.

‘Even foreigners living here illegally or without visas can get a free test without any questions,’ reads a Public Service Announcement by the South Korean government.

“Things are pretty normal around here,” a Nepali worker who did not want to be named told us by phone. “Awareness about precautions is high among workers, and we are frequently updated by official announcements.” Nepali workers going to Korea are on a government-to-government Employment Permit Scheme (EPS) and are required to pass a Korean language test, which means they can understand the COVID-19 updates.

Social media groups like Korea Sachetana Group have also been helpful in sharing information and support fellow Nepalis. “Recently we arranged for masks for Nepalis who could not find them in the market,” the worker said.

Another Nepali worker said his family back in Nepal was more worried than he was because they did not know about Korea’s strong health infrastructure. “In the media, they only hear about the infection rates and deaths going up,” he said.

However, Nepali workers have been affected by a more general slowdown of the Korean economy which depends on raw materials from China. Another Nepali at a small manufacturing firm says: “My work hours have been reduced, and I cannot do overtime anymore, I just earn my basic salary. But I am luckier than others who have been asked to stay home until further notice.”

The economic impact of the COVID-19 is also felt back in Nepal, with a new batch of workers who completed a rigorous selection process for employment in Korea through the EPS being asked to put off their departure. The same now applies for workers going to Qatar.

In the UAE, a Nepali worker is impressed with the strict precautions taken by the authorities there to contain the virus. “Sanitisers are available everywhere, and medical checks are conducted frequently, with quarantine facilities. They also do not distinguish based on nationality and legal status of individuals.”

Workers talk of visible slowdown in an otherwise bustling Dubai. Occupancy rates in hotels are down, as are room rates. Malls and restaurants have fewer people, and schools have been shut for four weeks. The fall in oil demand and drop in mobility of travellers is already having an impact on Nepali migrant workers who are employed in tourism, retail and hospitality across West Asia. 🇳🇵

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

Nepal’s economy, already weak, takes direct hit

Sanghamitra Subba

With business coming to a grinding halt globally due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Nepal’s migration and tourism-based economy is being severely impacted.

Global stock markets are in freefall, the US has halted trans-Atlantic flights, Italy is in lockdown, India has stopped issuing tourist visas, schools in Japan are closed, Qatar has banned nationals from 15 countries, Saudi Arabia has halted travel to nine countries, and although the virus has stabilised in next-door China, there is a danger there of reverse infection.

But as the epidemic spreads, Nepal has officially admitted to only one confirmed case of COVID-19. Public health experts say this does not mean there are no infected people, it just means suspected cases have not been tested yet. They say the country is not prepared to deal with an outbreak.

Even though there are no overt signs of a health crisis, Nepal’s economy has already been hit hard and the impact is expected to worsen in the coming months as tourism collapses and air travel is further curtailed.

The Asian Development Bank’s ‘COVID-19 Economic Impact Assessment Template’ released this week lays out the best- and worst-case scenarios for countries in the region. For Nepal, the bank predicts a loss of up to \$322 million.

The tourism sector has been impacted by travel restrictions imposed by Nepal and other countries, and airlines cancelling flights. On Wednesday, the government suspended on-arrival visas for nationals of Germany, Spain and France in addition to the previously announced Italy, China, Iran and South Korea. Most of

these are countries with top arrival figures, but nationals can still come provided they apply for a visa beforehand and carry a health certificate.

Even before the government called off Visit Nepal Year 2020, the campaign was criticised for lack of international promotion and the money being wasted on domestic extravaganza. Although

tourist arrivals saw only a slight drop to 101,400 in February, there was a 80% decrease in visitors from China.

Official figures are not yet available for March and April, but the travel industry is reporting widespread cancellations. Many international conferences and sports events have been postponed (*see page 12-13*). Hotel occupancy rates are dropping at what should have been peak season. Trekking and mountaineering expeditions have gone ahead but there has been a 50% decline in the number of clients. There are also reports of cancellations for April.

“Hotel bookings are down by 60% in the 5-star hotels around Nepal,” Shreejana Rana, President of Hotel Association of Nepal, told *Nepali Times*. “We had expected a surge in bookings after Chinese New Year and during the spring from American and European tourists but that isn’t the case.”

The first airlines to cancel flights were the ones operating to Chinese destinations: Himalaya Airlines, Sichuan Airlines and Tibet Airlines. Air China, China Southern and China Eastern are still operating flights, but with reduced frequency and smaller aircraft.

“The tourism industry is very sensitive. The smallest problem has widespread impact, and it takes a lot of time to recover from it,” says Deepak Raj Joshi, former CEO of Nepal Tourism Board. “We need to start preparing for the future right away.”

The Tourism Ministry is now repurposing Visit Nepal Year 2020 towards a 2020-2030 ‘Tourism Decade’, and the hotel industry is relying on domestic promotion, encouraging Nepalis to travel to Pokhara and to go trekking during the new-year break in April.

Nepal’s major infrastructure projects all face delays because of the reliance on Chinese contractors and workers. The start of the epidemic in January coincided with Chinese New Year, which meant that workers at new airport projects in Pokhara, Bhairawa and numerous hydropower plants under construction who had gone home could not return.

“Many of our engineers and workers have not been able to come back to Nepal,” says Bhairawa airport project chief Prabesh Adhikari. “There are about 25 Chinese workers on site and we are trying to move construction forward, but we need the rest to return.”

Even among those who have returned, some have been quarantined, including 70 who work on Pokhara’s new airport. If given the all-clear, they will be released only on 16 March. Construction at Bhairawa airport, which was scheduled to open later this year, is expected to be delayed.

“Although work has slowed down these past couple of months, we will work night and day to meet the target completion date of July 2021,” Pokhara airport manager Binesh Munakarmi assured *Nepali Times*.

The timely completion of hydropower projects, of which 65 have the involvement of Chinese companies, looks more bleak. Construction at 25 of these under-construction projects have not resumed since Chinese New Year. Workers have not been allowed to travel out of China, and necessary electro-mechanical equipment has also not been dispatched from China to Nepal.

“Even if one Chinese engineer is absent, or if one critical piece of equipment does not arrive from China, work stops,” says the President of the Independent Power Producers’ Association Shailendra Guragain. “If the situation worsens, we may be seeing losses amounting to a billion dollars in our projects.” 🇳🇵

road fatalities



BIKRAM RAI

giving ‘vaccines for roads’ to increase safety features. But very little of the infrastructure promoted by the program exist on Nepal’s roads, most of which are rated only one star out of five. Haphazard road construction in the past decade has not just disfigured the countryside with landslides, but also increased the rate of accidents.

More than 200 children were killed on Sweden’s roads every year in the 1970s, but that figure now hovers at about 15. Opening the conference, Swedish King Carl XVI Gustaf said there were tested ways of saving lives.

“Road safety should now be linked to other sustainability challenges, such as global health, climate change, equality, poverty and human rights,” the king said.

There are now nearly 2.4 million vehicles on Nepal’s roads, and a majority of them are two-wheelers, with 800,000 motorcycles in Kathmandu Valley alone. As the number of vehicles increases, so will the fatality rate.

Puspa Raj Pant, a Nepali researcher at the University of West of England in Bristol, is concerned about the lack of pedestrian crossings, cycle lanes and traffic signals in Nepal as well as lights or crash barriers along winding mountain roads.

“We have vaccines to fight killer diseases, but no medicines to reduce road fatalities,” he said. “Education, improved infrastructure and safer vehicles hold the key to improving road safety.” 🇳🇵



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No visas for viruses

Among the many silver linings of the Corona outbreak, The Ass learnt at the friendly neighbourhood watering hole this week, is that we can now stop worrying about Nepali politics. There are more serious things over which to panic.

GONe has been criticised for not doing enough to detect and control the virus, but that is unfair. Let me be the devil's legal adviser here and note that playing dead is Nepal's time tested method of solving a problem: pretend it does not exist. If you don't see it, there is nothing to fear. Out of sight is out of mind. It is really effective, you should try it some time.

Still, one cannot be more careful during these perilous times, so here are some simple precautions to stop the virus in its tracks before it violates Nepali air space.

Doing the namaste is going viral. The hand gesture is back in vogue as an alternative to the handshake, and even Prince Charles is doing it.

But the advice about namaste-ing left and right is misguided, and may actually make the problem worse. What if the virus is in one palm and not in the other? By executing a namaskar you have infected your other uncontaminated hand as well, and helped spread the pandemic.

A safer alternative is the traditional Maori *haka* greeting of showing tongues at each other as a welcome gesture. The president could greet new ambassadors at Shital Nibas with a tongue-lashing next time she receives accreditation from, let's say, the Plenipotentiary of São Tomé and Príncipe.

Health officials are promoting hand washing as the best antidote to the virus. We know this works brilliantly because the most effective way politicians have devised to deal with any problem is to wash their hands off it.

If, like most places in Nepal, there is soap but no water, just rub your fingers for 20 seconds, and utter a powerful Vedic mantra. That should kill all coronaviruses lurking in the immediate vicinity.

As the flu season ends and we enter the season of political unrest in Nepal, the government can ban all assembly of five or more people, citing the Covid threat, and stop all pesky demos at the Mandala.

Domestic airlines can announce further belt-tightening and stop serving peanuts on board. Next to go will be cotton earplugs, which hungry Dhangadi passengers sometimes eat. And no more barf bags, queasy passengers can open the emergency hatch to throw up.

If the situation worsens, airlines will switch to gliders which will use updrafts to gain height and cruise to their destinations. A test flight from Pokhara to Jomsom this week landed safely in Ladakh.

Meanwhile, security is beefed up at Kathmandu to apprehend any viruses trying to sneak into Nepal without visas. Masked gunmen are posted at the arrival concourse to apprehend suspicious micro-orgasms. Immigration officials are trained to be hostile and make germs feel unwelcome in Nepal.

Customs officials at the metal-free x-ray downstairs will now carry out aggressive antibody searches.



The Ass

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