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 (ITAN). “This is so sad 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 no 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 Sunmehr M Bhatti, 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 afflicted 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 our 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 Shalini Prasad Gurung. “If the situation worsens, we may be seeing losses amounting to a billion dollars in our projects.”

Sanghamitra Subba

- International events cancelled

- Crossborder virus and Nepali migrant workers

- The other global pandemic: road fatalities

- Economy takes direct hit

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Fear goes viral

The COVID-19 pandemic is blazing in China and is spreading to the rest of the world. First carried by international travellers newly year holiday makers from China to cities in Italy in February, it spread through public places. Interestingly, pilgrimage sites like Qom in Iran, a little-known, ancient pilgrimage site in western Iran, are centers of outbreaks. A virus is a strain of genetic material that can replicate itself, attaching itself to the DNA of the host and commandeering the organism to be its vehicle for transmission. Here’s a classic, COVID-19 is one step ahead of genetically engineered vaccines, and is so smart that it piggybacks 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 human immune system so sick that they cannot travel. This is the key – if you can’t make a disease kill its host, it can’t spread. The answer to the COVID-19 pandemic is to infuse workers flying to India and Pakistan to a gut punch to Nepal’s economy. 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 attract the already unrealistic goal of bringing millions 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 flights and expeditions for April. As our reports (pages 14 and 15) show, the impact on employment and income for service providers in hospitality and farmers dependent on selling produce to hotels is huge. VNTDC 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 recognized 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 growing concern in the political world that was swampy with nay-saying. This time around, we are experiencing the same situation, but this time it is the COVID-19 pandemic. "We are all waiting to see what happens next." (Issue 1027, 13-19 March 2010)

Nearly four years into the experience, Nepal’s peace process is stuck. Constitution talks are still deadlocked and its ground is mired in a real target of democracy reversal and revisiting. The political situation has brought about a state of national paralysis. Everything is so slow, and as we all wait to see what happens next, the nay-saying has surfaced, the country is literally dying. Lawlessness and crime have worsen, journalists are self-censoring and corruption doesn’t even make the news anymore. The republic is an apt adage.
DISCOVER MORE: USA

with the airline that flies to more countries than any other
Mishu Shrestha has worked hard to create a fashion brand that is going places in Nepal’s fashion industry

Mishu Shrestha, a 45-year-old fashion designer who founded MISSUUS fashion house in Kathmandu in 2012 after getting her diploma from Milan’s Oilbar School of Fashion, has come a long way in the fashion industry. From humble beginnings to being a successful fashion house, Mishu Shrestha has overcome several challenges to establish herself in the Nepalese fashion industry.

The fashion industry in Nepal is growing rapidly, and with the increasing demand for local fashion brands, Mishu Shrestha has found her niche in the market. Her brand MISSUUS has gained popularity among the young and modern fashionistas of Nepal.

Mishu Shrestha’s journey has not been easy. She faced several challenges, including lack of resources, competition, and the need to make her brand stand out in a crowded market. However, she remained determined to make her brand a success.

In 2018, Mishu Shrestha attended the Cannes Film Festival in France, where she showcased her brand’s collection. She says, “Attending the Cannes Film Festival was a dream come true for me. It was an opportunity to showcase my brand’s collection to the world’s fashion enthusiasts.”

Mishu Shrestha’s brand MISSUUS has been gaining popularity both in Nepal and internationally. She has also received several awards and recognition for her work in the fashion industry.

Mishu Shrestha believes that the future of the fashion industry in Nepal is bright. She says, “With the growing demand for local fashion brands, I believe that we will see more Nepali fashion designers making their mark in the international fashion market.”

Mishu Shrestha’s success story is a testament to the potential of the fashion industry in Nepal. With the right resources and support, Nepali fashion designers can make a significant impact on the global fashion scene.

By: Naresh Newar

**Hurdles come with the terrain in Nepal’s fashion industry**

**Qatar Airways**

Qatar Airways has launched a new campaign called “Flights to Experience” which highlights the human stories behind their flights. The campaign aims to showcase the unique experiences and cultures that can be discovered through travel.

**Turkish Airlines**

Turkish Airlines is set to launch flights to the United States in 2023, with plans to start operating flights from Istanbul to New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. The airline aims to enhance its presence in the U.S. market and expand its network of destinations.

**Samsung**

Samsung has announced the launch of the Galaxy A51 and Galaxy A61. These new smartphones come with advanced features such as high-quality cameras, long battery life, and waterproof capabilities.

**Coca-Cola**

Coca-Cola has launched a new program called “The Coke Because We Can” which focuses on empowering women in the workplace and beyond. The program aims to provide women with the necessary skills and support to succeed in their careers.

**Hyundai Golf**

Hyundai Golf Philippines has launched a new campaign called “The Game Changer” which highlights the features and benefits of their latest models. The campaign aims to attract younger customers and increase sales in the Philippines market.

**Nepal Times**

Nepal Times is a leading English newspaper in Nepal, covering news, politics, and culture in the country. The newspaper has a strong online presence and attracts a large audience of readers.

**Prabhu Bank**

Prabhu Bank is a leading financial institution in Nepal, offering a range of banking services including retail and corporate banking, investment banking, and insurance services. The bank has a strong presence in the country and attracts a large number of customers.
Reincarnation of old phones in Nepal

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

Shristi Karki

Many Nepalis are torn about growing consumerism and throwaway culture, but most strong and move on because they think one person cannot change the world.

But not Shweta Tewari and Uttam Kapila. Both were working in the development sector, and felt they should do something concrete to prove that sustainability makes 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 minimizing resource extraction and waste. Tewari and Kapila studied models for a circular economy that would work in the Nepal business context.

Tewari and Kapila moved 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 24 billion. 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 Kapila explain that most Nepalis seek a phone upgrade 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 Rs 1 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 to the market, the lighter the economic and ecological burdens.”

Sabko Phone’s sustainability practice extends beyond phone repair and refurbishing. Tewari and Kapila are researching alternative uses for phone parts that cannot be reused in phones. The company sells its phones in boxes made of recycled Nepali paper, and most of the furniture in Sabko Phone’s office is reused or reupholstered. “The company calculates its carbon footprint and at the end of each working year, and works 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 it, for example, 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 want,” she says. “We want others to join us and be a part of this movement.”
Remembering Des-la at Shangri-la

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

A capsule is a celebration in the time of coronavirus, and its theme is the Hotel’s Shambala Garden which is located in the Kathmandu Valley. The hotel is a peaceful and serene place.

“Oho no, I ever found to invite my sister!” grunts Kamala Dixit. She has a long nose, large black eyes, and a cheerful smile. She is wearing a black dress and a gold bangle on her right hand.

Lisa Choegyal

“SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

SEPAH MEMORIES: Sir Edmund Hillary’s signed photo hangs in a third floor corridor with Stuart Hall and everyone’s favorite picture of Desmond Doig at Shangri-la hotel plans in 1975. Doig is at left.

Desmond Doig (c) was a renaissance man and died in 1983 while working on Shangri-la (South). The Shangri-la’s Shambala Garden is a tranquil and elegant place, and is now expanded beyond Pokhara into Sagna and Chitwan.

The enduring spirit of the hotel, firmly imprinted in its conception by Desmond Doig’s own hand, is still with us today. I am grateful to the owner, owner Shyam Bhojraj, for allowing me to write this article. This hotel is a lifetime of journalism for me.

Dubby Shagat, Robert Powell and Chris Read 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 six sons, maintained a watchful eye.

Nepal Times

NATION

13 - 19 March 2020

The Prime Minister attended the reception honouring the Himalayan Chronicle, Elizabeth Stanley, with 35 years of service to the community. Kunda had survived as her maternal aunt. Always a stickler for accuracy, to our embarrassment, she kept interrupting the regional host; facsimile speech with factual corrections. Ten years later in 2004, under an elegant white swan in a peaceful corner of the garden, Bernardette Vasseux and I hosted a small lunch to mark The New Zealand Queen’s visit to Nepal. Desmond could be seen with great joy, the first time I met him, and the New Zealand Queen’s visit to Nepal.

Desmond could sometimes be prevailed upon to guest-edit our books, and was especially spectacular on the subject of Nepal. My favourite story was during a tiger safari, he believed Kathmandh, the tour bus pulled into the heart of the Durbar Square to admire the exquisite temple scene. A fruity British voice boomed disapprovingly from the back seat: ‘Awful lot of people hanging around doing nothing.’

Praveen Shrestha, writer, historian, and explorer, was one of the first to introduce the Shangri-la to the media. He and I have worked together on many projects over the years.

Yeti Airlines offers the widest network in Nepal.

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Nepal’s new Davos man

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

Om Astha Rai

The World Economic Forum’s annual list of Young Global Leaders (YGL) has featured very few Nepalis so far. The 2013 batch included Nepali Congress MP Gagan Thapa.

Others who have made it to the list include Anshumi Rana (2006), Ashish Tiwari (2011) and Tibetang Lams (2013).

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 sama foundation.

His inclusion puts Pariyar in the company of Jacinda Ardern, Mark Zuckerberg, Jack Ma, Chelsea Clinton, Farhan Akhtar and Vinayakan Anand. Many previous YGL title-holders are now running governments, heading international organizations 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 Sindhuuli 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 Pariyar 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 Golchha 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 Sindhuuli 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 bottled 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 traveled through the midwestern mountains, where he met many disoriented, disillusioned and hopeless youths. He realized 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 Organizations 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 cadres are just waiting for their turn to get old and claim the posts. This does not bode well for our future.”
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 well-stocked 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 Merlot with their dry and smooth finish, and came back repeatedly to buy more of the same.

Astounding! She also knew little about the vast variety of wines before deciding to study it. It was because of the potential she 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 (name withheld). 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 palates, from Chardonnary to Syrah to Gobert Sauvignon. Nepali customers typically prefer Merlot and Chardonnary.

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

We asked Rana to list his top 10 most popular wine brands. See below.

10 MOST POPULAR WINES

Oreno Toscano IGI, Temuta Sette Ponti 2014 Italy Rs 12,586

Oreno Toscano is a Bordeaux blend. This 2014 wine is Tuscan red and poses a flavour of flowers, citrus fruit and currants. It has a polished aftertaste. This wine complements full-flavoured meats, game and roasts.

Amarone della Valpolicella D.O.C.G, Telidoschi 2014 Italy Rs 32,000

Strong ruby-red in colour and clear and transparent, with notes of vanilla and an intense aroma, depending on the ageing period of the barrels. 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.

Costa Rossi Barbaresco D.O.P, Gaja 2014 Italy Rs 107,500

The 2014 Costa Rossi is an amalgamation of berry fruits – strawberry, raspberry, mulberry and black cherry. It also holds floral and spicy notes of tannins, 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.

Champagne Premiere Cuvee, Bruno Paillard Champagne France Rs 18,300

A combination of three grapes – Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Meunier – this French champagne oozes with fresh bristle and toast flavour along with sweet cherries and strawberries. It has a bright straw gold colour. It is slightly salty and any fish or even seafood will go well with this drink.

Bellavista Alma Cuvee Brut, Franciacorta D.O.C.G Italy Rs 5,720

Alma Cuvee has a white, bubbly and persistent mousse with bright yellow colour and luminous glints of green. The taste carries hints of sweet ripe fruit, apricots, pastries and candied citrus peel. Highly recommended with fish.
Chardonnay pairs well with salmon. Pinot Noir with suphaghts 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.

Which wine with momos?

French sommelier Antoine Garet has been based in Kathmandu for over a decade. Fluent in Nepali, he currently runs Lalitpur-based restaurant Vito Bistrot, 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 pressure, and how one does it will depend on the diner’s palate.

If the dish 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 has a light and refreshing taste that will help dissolve the momo’s strong flavours in between bites. He has a different take, however, on dal bhat and sekuwa.

If you want to drink wine with your meal, opt for a thick wine. It’s all about balance, and why waste a good rich taste on something that doesn’t go well together? He also advises that prawn should not be eaten with red wine, as the elements don’t work well together.

**Sauvignon Blanc, Framingham 2017**
New Zealand
Rs 4,914

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 palate of wine.

**Prosecco Treviso Silver D.O.C., Follador**
Italy
Rs 3,323

This wine has a bright yellow straw colour and flowers bubbles with delicate foam. The aroma is fresh and zesty, notice a fresh, well-structured and pleasant aftertaste. Best paired with starters, aperitifs and cocktails, fish and shellfish.

**Vesper Chardonnay, Fontana di papà**
Italy
Rs 6,838

This wine is straw yellow in color with golden hues and the bouquet is truly, aromatic and pleasant. On the palate, it is fresh, round and balanced. It pairs well with starters and fish dishes.
**EVENTS**

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**Tinchuli Hike**
Take a walk to nature’s marvel. Nurture your mind, body, and soul in this meditation hike. 14 March, 8:30 a.m., Bhaneshwor. For details (01) 4077779.

**Farms 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, 8:30 a.m., Le Shigyo, Makhanapur.

**Guitar Workshop**
The ninth edition of the Guitar Science Workshop will include discussions by Tamal Carrasco on the flute, Miss Edmond on electric acoustic guitar, and Harknawak on the technical aspect of music. 14 March, 2:30 p.m., Guitar Shop, Aaydanpur, 9848800307.

**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’ve done. 14 March, 4 p.m., Yumi, Ticket Rs 2500, Hotel St Regis, Khokana, Tusha.

**Poetry Evening**
Join the community of poets by performing your original poetry on stage and listening to the rendition of other poems at this open art event. 13 March, 6-8 p.m., K Magical Cellar Lounge, Lopnath (01) 5806755.

**Board Game Night**
Join the weekly board game night. Play Smart Up, Carcassonne, Star Wars, Zombies, and more. If you love your board game with you, bring your board game for others. March 12, 4 p.m., BP, 1st Floor, 2nd Avenue, Balkumari, Tusha.

**Meditation Workshop**
Take time out of your busy schedule to calm your mind and manage your moods. Every Monday and Tuesday, 8:30-10:15 a.m., Bluprint Art Center, Tusha (01) 501332.

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**MUSIC**

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**Beats Tribute**
Join Kaak as they pay tribute to The Beatles. 13 March, 8:30-10:15 p.m., Pasubabu and Lounge, Pokhara. For details (01) 5355021.

**Rohit J.Chhetri**
Spends a musical evening with Rohit J.Chhetri. 13 March, 7:30 p.m., Dine & Bar, Bhaktapur. For details (01) 5066017.

**Trishna Gurung**
Enjoy singer-songwriter Trishna Gurung’s performance at her popular songs, including Krisho in the Name. Stay for the afterparty. 13 March, 7 p.m., Yumi, Ticket Rs 1200, Hotel Nepal, Tusha. (01) 5066017.

**Bluegrass Jam**
A jam session from a group of Bluegrass musicians travelling with Music Art Adventures. 13 March, 8 p.m., CO2, Aaydanpur, (01) 4247479.

**DINING**

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**Thistle Triangle**
The special feit Fei wing, an triple chicken feast in last any form by Thistle’s Niagara menu is a great treat. Thistle Niagara, Bluemoon, Thikse (01) 4321787.

**Saturday Barbecue**
Sing the day with your illusionaries and have some good food. 14 March, 5 p.m., Thimphu, Nepal. (01) 4465999.

**Kaiser Cafe**
A quaint restaurant with a nice menu and attentive service, hidden in a corner of the Garden of Delights. Enjoy the drizzle after a relaxing walk around the serene garden. Kaiser Cafe, Tusha (01) 4515777.

**GETAWAY**

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**Hotel Annapurna View**
Situates amid the forests of Nagarkot, this resort features ultra modern design and world-class comfort. Annapurna, Pokhara (01) 445556.

**Mystic Mountain**
Situates amid the forests of Nagarkot, this resort features ultra modern design and world-class comfort. Annapurna, Pokhara (01) 445556.

**Allof**
Tucked in the heart of Dinesh Camp, Allof, a global chain of hotels, offers some of the best modern design and architecture in Kathmandu. From beauty salons and spas to restaurants and shops, Allof is a place for visitors to indulge. Tusha, Tusha (01) 232000.

**Maruni Sanctuary Lodge**
Only a few minutes’ walk from the village of Bandipur, Bandipur, and explore with cultural diversity and traditional architecture. Bandipur, Tusha, (01) 5015032.

**Prateek Kuhad**
Prateek Kuhad, hailed by Rolling Stone India as one of the country’s leading singer-songwriters, is out in Kathmandu, as part of his global tour. 14 March, 9 p.m., Shopy’s, Boudha, (01) 4252555.

**Claro Bistro**
If you’re heading to Claro Bistro, be prepared to have the weekend fully and happy. The restaurant’s carefully curated menu of salads, pizzas, sausages, appetizers and desserts will keep you wanting more and more. Every Sunday. Pasubabu, (01) 4357540.

**Blenders**
Have a cold reusable bottle of milkshake at the new milkshaker bar. Blenders’ exciting flavours and cute light bulbs shaped glass bottles will keep you coming back for more. 14 March, 8 a.m., City Center, Radha Pratap, (01) 5857101.

**Bandipur Kunshi Inn**
A small, rustic place to stay in the idyllic village of Bandipur, explore with cultural diversity and traditional architecture. Bandipur, Tusha, (01) 5015032.

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**AIR QUALITY INDEX**

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This week has been relatively better in terms of the PM2.5 count in the Air Quality Index. Up to 80% of the daily average was hovering in the Red Zone (110-199) but the concentration of pollutants in the air we breathed was still eight times worse than the WHO standards. The air quality was either clear or clean in the air. A monthly average of the past 30 days can be seen here: https://nepal.mapi.gov.np/air-quality-monitor/
The European Union Ambassador to Nepal Veronica Cody spoke to Nepali Times about being a female diplomat in Nepal.

Nepali Times: Does being a woman make the job of an ambassador easier or more difficult?
Ambassador Cody: The duties of an ambassador can be carried out equally well by a man or a woman. Anybody who has gone through the formal process of education and training to become a diplomat can easily accept the challenge. The question is more do men and women have equal access to that education and training. And are women being offered the opportunity to enter and prosper in areas of work which have traditionally been male-dominated, like diplomacy. Gender stereotyping is still very prevalent, and young girls can inherit prevailing views that the world of politics is not for women.

Over my career, I have seen a considerable increase in the number of women entering diplomatic service in Europe and around the world, and the number of female ambassadors here in Nepal is testimony to that. However, this has been a slow process and there is much room still for greater representation in diplomacy by women, particularly at the highest levels.

What kinds of reactions have you received from people in Nepal when they realize that you are the EU ambassador?
I have been in Nepal for two-and-a-half years now and I think it is very important to see the whole country, to visit the different provinces and see both urban and rural areas. I travelled to the mid and far west parts of the country last year. This year, I travelled to the mid-eastern part of the country. The people I met were very welcoming and hospitable, and for the most part expressed no surprise on finding out that I was an ambassador. There were a few occasions where the khada and garland of flowers were extended to a male colleague rather than to me – in the expectation that the man must be the ambassador! But once the introduction was made, I was always treated with the utmost respect.

Do you feel like women in media make a difference in coverage?
Each profession has its own pros and cons. Media is a field where a diverse workforce and a diverse work environment definitely make a difference in the way issues are covered and dealt with. Experience from around the world reveals that a larger number of women in the field of media would contribute towards more coverage of issues of concern to women, and more coverage from a woman’s perspective, which is not necessarily that of a man. Women journalists have privileged access to half of the population and that should be considered an asset by their media houses.

I attended 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 to break the stereo-type and what they wish to achieve. The EU supported the first women journalist mountainers who scaled Everest two years ago. I was impressed by their ambition to get to the Summit, the hard training they underwent to prepare themselves for the challenges, and the determination and resilience they showed in achieving it – all skills that make for great journalists! Women journalists deserve to get to the top of their profession as well, and this would benefit all Nepali citizens.
A news item about the effects of COVID-19 on international events, particularly film festivals and cricket tournaments, is accompanied by a photo of a woman wearing a mask and protective gear, likely at an event.

**United Against Virus:** Chinese Ambassador to Nepal Yang Yong 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 Nepali Prataman Party (United) Pushpa Bajrangi Rana and Prakash Chandra Lal, and chair of Nepali Prataman Party Kamal Thapa signed an agreement to unify their two parties on Tuesday.

**Corona Role:** A woman in a wheelchair wearing a mask and eye protection is enjoying a day out in Katmandu.

**Lending a Hand:** Equipment to protect health workers from the coronavirus donated by UNDP and WHO is being used in Kathmandu on Monday to be dispatched to hospitals.

**All That Glitters:** Miss World 2019 Tanishq Virag from Jamnagar with Miss Nepal 2019 Anushka Shrestha at Kathmandu Airport on 3 March. Singh came for a three-day beauty with a Purpose event with Shrestha.
amidst COVID-19 fears

Rights International Film Festival (NHRIFF), which was scheduled to kick off on 6 March, is one of the international events that has decided to honour the Nepal government’s appeal. Every year, Human Rights Film Center (HRFC) brings together human rights filmmakers and human rights activists from around the world to screen their films and debate human rights issues. This year, 64 films from 32 countries were selected to be screened at the festival.

Likewise, 25 filmmakers from 17 countries were travelling 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 Pandur Khatri said: “HRFFI 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. Bishnu 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 Samudra, 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 the 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.

Nepal’s government has also decided to screen travellers at 37 entry points along the Nepal-India border.

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The COVID-19 epidemic has hit countries where millions of Nepali workers

Nepal’s remittance-based economy has always been vulnerable to international upheavals like tension in West Asia, or economic downturn in Migrant workers. 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.

Kuwait 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 (190), Kuwait (685), Oman (18) and Saudi Arabia (15).

Last week, the UN suspended travel bans on Nepalis, and last week 30 Nepali workers on routes 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 to Western Asia.

"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 Centre for Molecular Dynamics Nepal. "Nepal itself may have infected people who are not diagnosed."

The other global pandemic:

While attention is fixed on COVID-19, road traffic accidents are killing 3,500 people worldwide daily.
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, India is in lockdown, Italy has started restricting tourist visas, schools in Japan are closed, Qatar has banned nationals from 15 countries, Saudi Arabia has banned travel to nine countries, and although Tunisia has not shut its doors, China, then there is a clear 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 Team's 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 travelers from Germany and France amid concerns regarding the previously announced Italy, China, and Iran South. Most of these are countries with top arrival figures, but nationals can still come provided they apply for a visa and pay the USD 200 visa fee or have the certificate.

Even before the government called off Visa Nepal Year 2020, the campaign was criticized for lack of planning and coordination and the money being wasted on domestic advertisements. Although tourist arrivals saw only a slight drop to 101,000 from 108,000 in January, there was a 50% decrease in visitors from China.

Even if the Chinese engineer is abroad, tourism is being hit regardless. Even if tourists in the country have not been tested yet, it is expected to take a hit.

Nepal may not officially have an outbreak cluster yet, but COVID-19 is bringing down the economy.
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 Shitall 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 boosted 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-organisms. 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.