HAMMER VS SICKLE

Not much has changed since the row within the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) erupted in February over the $500 million Millennium Challenge Compact (MCC) grant from the US government to build transmission lines in Nepal.

A dissenting faction led by party co-chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal is still using the MCC as a battering ram to try to dislodge Prime Minister Oli from office. He has got Parliament Speaker Agni Sapkota to delay debate in the House, mobilised ex-UML dissidents and the NCP secretariat in which his faction has a majority, and incite populism and ultra-nationalism through the media to sabotage the initiative.

The five-year project would help link new hydropower producers to the national grid, and export surplus electricity to India.

Governments of major parties all enthusiastically endorsed the project when it was signed in 2017. But suddenly, it’s stuck because the MCC has become a political football between the two alpha male of Nepali polities.

Dahal has used ex-UML figures like former prime ministers Madhav Kumar Nepal and Baburam Bhattarai, as well as Ram Baran Yadav, to bag Oli. While Dahal has remained behind the scenes, others have been on TV talk shows and social media to say that the MCC is anti-Chinese and is America’s response to China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Outnumbered in the party secretariat, Oli has been trying to woo Nepal and shift away from the Dahal faction. He said recently: “We need transmission lines. If the Americans want to build them for free, what’s the problem?”

Most of the leadership of the Nepali Congress is for the MCC, which means the project represents an internal power struggle in the ruling party, while the government and the opposition are on the same page.

KNOWING WHAT’S GOOD FOR NEPAL

Many of the bureaucrats involved in designing the MCC say they envisaged it as a project capable of jump-starting the economy through better connectivity, hydropower developers on the Budi Gandagi, Trishuli, Kali Gandaki, Marsyangdi, Kosi and Trishuli Kosi corridors all need the MCC’s 400kV, Kathmandu-Hetauda-Dhulikhel transmission line to evacuate the electricity they generate.

“It is important for Nepal to start building these transmission lines with or without the Americans,” says Hiteshwar Shakya, a power grid expert.

There is an extra 430MW of generation capacity coming up on the Bhote Koshi in Rasuwa and Nawakot, although they have been delayed due to the lockdown. A 220kV transmission line has already been built to take some of that electricity to Kathmandu Valley, but more grid capacity will be needed to transfer power to other load centers, and even sell future surplus to India.

This monsoon, Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) is already losing almost $2 million a day in spill energy because of the reduction in demand during the lockdown. But the utility has signed agreements to buy 6,000MW more from private producers in the next five years. Without the transmission lines, those agreements will have to be scrapped, and Nepal may plunge back into the dark days of power cuts.

Kunda Dixit
Knowing what’s good for Nepal

I

Nepal’s politicians do not come to their senses soon, a $500 million US grant for critical infrastructure will be cancelled. This will be a disaster for the government, which is already facing severe economic challenges.

The Millennium Challenge Compact (MCC) was terminated by the US government in 2004 as an independent agency to seek innovative ways to end poverty in least developed countries. The MCC’s mission was to make a difference as a partner, and planning for the MCC started during the government of Baburam Bhattarai.

The entire philosophy of MCC leadership, as well as NPC leaders, has so far been trying to agree with the MCC agenda, initially involved in the institutions of the design of the MCC.

The MCC has been weaponised by Pushpa Kamal Dahal against his main rival, Prime Minister Oli.

Nepal was suffering up to 18 hours of load-shedding a day, so the MCC team, along with Nepal’s politicians and bureaucrats decided that transmission lines were urgently needed to evacuate generated electricity to load centres, boost consumption of clean energy to replace imported petroleum, and export any excess to the Indian market.

The Nepal government signed the agreement in 2017. But when it came time to implement the Compact and award the $500 million, along with another $310 million equivalent for the Nepal Government, the allegations suddenly arose from the CCP bank. Some loyalists consolidated just jumped on the bandwagon.

The government of Nepal as a victim of American imperialism and geopolitical designs, the anti-MCC campaign has used in party machinations, ultra-nationalist posturing, and projection against the project. If you would believe it, the Americans are about to steal Nepali intellectual property, give all MCC-related gifts to Americans, and locate missile silos of the US in Nepal at China.

The USA Under Secretary of State David T. Buss last year lashed the funding by saying that the MCC was part of the US Indo-Pacific Strategy. That footnote comment was picked up by critics to prove that the MCC is against China.

The Americans backpedalled furiously, but the damage was done. Truth be told, the nepal nepal.com

SUMMATA VIRAS

[1] A woman (‘I care how Nepal is presented on the world stage’) page 10/10 believes and informed, well spoken, with exactly the right tone to convey harmony and understanding.

[2] Sri Lanka, she has to say to any story to convey harmony and economic growth, equity and social justice.

[3] I hope our media work less suggestions and makes changes in such way of presentation.

Dipak Gurung

WEEKEND LONGREADS

Investigation into Nepali lobby’s attack on Kejriwal’s shoplifting claims. I believe these ‘horrifics’ from Nepal. This one is really good, if you like the sort of story.

Ashish Thakur

WORLD CUP LABOUR

Shocking practices in World Cup stadium workers in Qatar unpaid. Nepali engineers claim a lack of human degradation and misery.

Rachel Hodger

I am so sad to see people being taken advantage of this way. We need to boost companies and events who exploit people like this. Taking profits from them is the only thing they understand.

Jasson King

Anti-Government

They are helping the economy by redistributing, and contributing in various other aspects, and this is how the government pays them back. (The high cost of returning to Nepal)

Priyanka

Incompetence is not acceptable. (More anti-government protests in Kathmandu, nepaltimes.com). Make room for those who listen to the people, care about the people and truly represent the people.

Sahira Shah:

I do agree the government is corrupt and they need to do something more for the good of all people in Nepal. But these are over-hyped. These are the ruin of the #10Kp

Eshelam

This protest should not rest until we make this government transparent, accountable, and responsible towards its citizens. What a diagnose when a foreign government claims to care about the Nepali people with their own interests in the worst interest.

Dine Souror

The government of the United States where Kathmandu is required to balance two belligerent neighbor powers India and China, Nepal needs to keep the West supportive of its development agenda and place in the world. Failure to accept the MCC would not only poison Nepal’s relationship with the UK, it would also help boost the international community for the worst of reasons – not knowing what is good for us.

Human Rights Denied

At least the justice system is doing a Job. Those who have persecuted war criminals, will be put in jail. A race against time. Time is running out for those war criminals. (Nepali Times)

Kim Bee

The perpetrators of war crimes are in power. They will have sufficient excess. (Laibahadep Nepal)

New Map Bill

The bill is an Inoffensive result of the recent protests and rallied done by the youth of Nepal, although the cause was unrelated but the message has gone to the political realm. It seems (Nepal map bill, India reidus, nepaltimes.com).

Tango Weplab

Hard work lies ahead. Dealing with China requires considerable planning and teamwork on Nepali side. It is caught 22.

Gynee Dendup

It has been a disputed area since ages (‘I care how Nepal is presented on the world stage’) page 10/10 absolutely denied, well spoken, with exactly the right tone to convey harmony and understanding.

Suman Thapa

THE DENGUE VIRUS IN NEPAL

The dangers of the dengue virus for Nepal

We have had four days with rain but the April-May is coming. The monsoon may bring Kathmandu, NCT 2013, but the virus and we talk about — let’s stay calm, unknown weather. Need help in the history of Indian climate column where we talk about the dengue virus.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

The Kathmandu airfilter begins

Published freshly.

A series of social ads about the government's following its own guidelines about regulating pollution and its impact on health, short and long-term.

Most visited online page

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

10 years ago this week in Nepal

In 1998, in the capital, Nepal, it was a 10 years ago this week that the Kathmandu airfilter began.

Why is Nepal not producing a public health alert? There are many reasons: first, there are too many people who regularly complaints. Why should we be eating vegetables that are freshly harvested in the USA? Why not eat vegetables in the USA? Nepal is a country that is not about the GNP. It’s not about what you are seen. It’s about what you do.

What Nepal needs right now is a proper public health alert which is what it needs. But as a large-scale campaign that advocates for Nepal’s health, the emphasis is on the fact that there is nothing going wrong with Nepal. Nepal has been successful.
Ode on unlocking
Nature is settling into the hollow spaces of the lockdown

No one forgets there is a lockdown going on, but you could be forgiven for believing the Valley is a bejewelled crown, freshly washed with unseasonal downpours, the air unusually pristine and clean.

SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

No one forgets the process of unlocking might be even more painful, but the distant white peaks are unveiled, every scrap of empty land is productive with cultivation, the birds clutter in the unaccustomed quiet.

No one forgets the growing clamour of dissatisfied voices throughout the country, but the garden has regained a thousand shades of green, soaking up the showers and storms, the voice of the river making itself heard as the waters swell.

No one forgets the tear gas attacks as protesters politely request accountability from their leaders for pandemic preparations during the past ten weeks, but early morning mist swaths the hills and swarms of insects cloud the clover-bedded trees. Nature is settling into the hollow spaces of the lockdown, creeping like the people convivially that has overtaken our neglected hedges.

No one forgets the terrible human cost of the virus, but birds twitter, flit, chirp, sing and squawk louder than ever, the cuckoo dominates the cacophony and noisy flumphs meow most strident long before dawn.

No one forgets the plight of the hungry and the sick, the distress of the deprived and destitute, but dark sites delicately till their wings on their overloaded patrols and packs of nose-tipped pankets fan their tapered tails to perch neatly in the yellow bamboo.

No one forgets the devastation to the valley economy, but the twilight symphony at dusk features staccato crickets in stereo with undertones of coolig pigeons and croaking frogs, and the occasional basso profundo crow.

No one forgets the suffering of migrants, the dismal border quarantine and the dilemma of the stranded both here and abroad, but butterflies float through the blossoms, bees industriously collect their nectar and dragonflys hover hopefully over the quiet pond.

Despite the science, we eagerly embrace the freedom to fill the formerly deserted streets on odd and even number days, to escape our overfamiliar locked down homes where the nutty shadows chase around the rooms and moods fluctuate with the day, whilst outside, the window seasons evolve from spring to summer.

What do I know?

Tashi Sherpa

I wonder what I must be like to be the outsider.
What do I know of the universe denied to you, the euphoria of your song, this crush of ancient inequity, bodies of shame that cut like air and rape the soul.

Fear that rips your muscles when, aches, bruises and disinclined aim their arrows at your soul. How do I gauge the dark depths in your portrait and your eyes the weight of your speech.

In defence is norm. Sullen, silent and hoarded in hurt and defiant pride. How could I see or hear.

When I have stayed blind and deaf, Wholly superior, purposely negligible on perpetuals of privilege, and self anointed caste. Pontificating.

My sympathies, mutal at best false removed, In a bubble of twinge ignorance. I may read the signs.
But haven't I let the lights of the burn of glaring, you get from lurking looks.

The avowed shuffles in scanning, social distancing in auto mode when they see you approach.
Eyes down on the village path, the sidewalk, the subway stop.
You do not seek my mercy, my useless righteousness, my guilt ridden compassion you’re not asking to eat, to comfort or the crumb of my plate or the soil under our feet. You detest the smell of all the lower end of couture when all you want is the equality of respecting your presence, of accepting your absence.

Just like one of us.
Why do you Have to be the one to make a cascade of doing right when they’ve always seen you wrong.

It must be exhausting and exhausting... Exhilarating... this existence.
Nunuta Rai

G
iven the unlikelihood of mother-to-child transmission, the COVID-19 pandemic should not have a significant impact on childbirth, but the lockdown imposed to curb the virus in the past three months has indirectly led to a rise in maternal deaths in Nepal.

Lack of transportation has meant that many women have not been able to get pre and ante-natal care. There has been a sharp rise in home deliveries, and when complicated maternal cases do arrive at hospitals, it is sometimes too late.

Although Nepal’s maternal mortality rate has come down dramatically over the past 20 years, the lockdown has worsened an already substantial maternal healthcare system in rural areas.

Srijana Khushi is a five months pregnant and had recently visited Patan Hospital for her first dose of the Tetravac-DTP (HE) vaccine. She waited for three hours before being attended to, due to a breakdown of the vaccination center.

“I was expecting the lockdown to open up, but instead, the coronavirus situation is spreading even more,” says Thapa. “I don’t own a vehicle to go by myself, and I’m scared of going to hospitals due to the higher risk of coronavirus there.”

Two doses of TET vaccine are recommended for all pregnant women. Recommended doses are not only in the health of the newborn child, but also in meeting the targets set by the UN Sustainable Development Goal 3, which Nepal has committed to. However, more than three months into the lockdown, pregnant women across the country say having a hard time visiting health facilities for regular check-ups, thereby losing access to essential supplies of iron, calcium, folic acid pills, and recommended vaccines.

Kusum Kafle of Jhapa is four months pregnant, but has not been able to go for a check-up and find out about the condition of her baby. She has had to buy iron pills for her baby from other people at first-cost from medical stores. Health-wise I’m fine but without regular check-ups, I’m afraid for my baby,” she says.

Health facilities across the country, already under-equipped and dealing with the pressure of the COVID-19 outbreak, are now running out of their stock of essential prenatal medication. Their efforts to provide check-ups and consultations to pregnant women are hindered by the restrictions placed to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Shanti Khush, who works as a female health volunteer in 660 villages of Jhapa district, says she has not been able to supply patients with essential medicines due to lockdown.

“I’m not in a position to provide consultations to pregnant women in my community,” she says.

Pawar Sharma at the Patan Academy of Health Sciences (PAHS) advises expecting mothers not to visit the hospital unless required to and to get necessary consultations via phone or online platforms.

“Women are experiencing normal pregnancies. I recommend that they stay put at home with a balanced diet and basic exercises,” says Sharma who has been providing consultations to expecting mothers via PAHS Viber service. “Vital health clinics for blood pressure check-ups and iron pills. And if one must visit a hospital, mask, sanitiser, and physical distancing are a must.”

Jignesh Gautam, director of the Nepapar Maternity Hospital in Kathmandu, says “We have seen pregnant women visit the hospital only in the case of emergency or for the TET vaccine. Otherwise, we have set up a toll-free number for telephone consultation.”

Traffic restrictions and the continued ban on public transport have rendered pregnant women immobile, causing a spike in deaths caused during childbirth. UN estimates show that roughly, a woman dies in childbirth every two minutes around the world – a bulk of these deaths in developing countries.

However, Nepal is considered to be a success story in improving survival rates for childbirth. Between 1990 and 2015, Nepal reduced its maternal mortality ratio from 901 deaths per 100,000 live births to 258. It had gone down further but the COVID-19 lockdown has been a spike in maternal and neonatal mortality across the country that threatens to undo the progress.

The situation is worse in remote areas where hospitals are few and far between, and communities are plagued by regressive patriarchal values, cramped with a lack of awareness about reproductive healthcare.

Rajputa Hospital in Achham district recently persuaded a patient who lived 7 hours away to stay at the hospital for her childbirth. She gave birth to healthy twins. However, such positive outcomes are rare during the lockdown.

Delays in getting the pregnant women to hospitals has been a major reason for maternal mortality in the mountains of Nepal and this is exactly where the lockdown has hit the hardest,” says Bhikhu Ganou, healthcare director at Rajputa.

There have been at least 30 reported maternal deaths nationwide in the past two months, and this is much lower than the average as fewer mothers are doing institutional delivery because of the fear of coronavirus.

"Maternal deaths have gone up dramatically during the lockdown, most of them cases of excessive bleeding, ruptured uterus, and infections directly linked with the inability to access birthing facilities due to the lockdown,” says Punya Pandey at the Family Welfare Division.

Although the Ministry of Health and Population has come up with interim guidelines to allow the detention of effects of COVID-19 on reproductive healthcare, public health experts fear the mass movement of returning migrant workers across the country will continue to impact many pregnant women among them.

With additional reporting by Suresh Awale

Saving one Nepali mother at a time

At 11AM on 23 May, 2-year-old Saravan Prabhakar of Tame Tundama village in Baglung district arrived at his daughter’s naming ceremony at his home in India. His wife was waiting in India, and they were unsure how to get the baby home and called local authorities.

His wife, Shobha Shankar, who had been helping to transport the newborn, contacted the Nepal Embassy in India to dispatch a rescue chopper from Pokhara. A journey from Pokhara and Saravan Prabhakar was airlifted to the Western Regional Health Office in Pokhara. The rescue helicopter was suffering from severe mechanical issues, but an annual commemorative rescue exercise, which has been held every year from Pokhara for the past 10 years, had delivered babies only 11 days ago at a local birthing centre in Baglung.

“Rescue helicopters happen to be high blood pressure. But regular check-ups to monitor blood pressure and medicines can help prevent it,” explains Suresh Shankar, a physician at Hospital Maternity Hospital in Kathmandu.

Saravan Prabhakar’s wife was taken away in an ambulance to a nearby hospital, and the baby’s condition was stable. Many other Nepali mothers with complications are not in luck during the lockdown.

“The government had more accessible emergency rescue mechanisms, but more pregnant women and new mothers wouldn’t have to lose their lives,” says Major Shilver Singh Thapa, who recently served in Pokhara.

Saving Nepal from the lockdown

The western frontier has become a major hub in evaluating emergency cases of maternity care in the region with the biggest maternal mortality in Nepal. It has continued to be the least affected of all regions.

Patients unable to access timely healthcare services due to the containment lockdown, the instability of health facilities, or their inability to pay for treatment, have been at risk of requiring rescue medical interventions.

20-year-old Nima Karki from Chauri of Arghakhanchi district was 23 weeks pregnant when she had complications that needed an immediate operation. She was airlifted to the Jhapa Medical College in Arghakhanchi.

In another case, 23-year-old Sujata Majhi of Kanchanpur district was diagnosed with kidney infection following childbirth. She was taken to Teaching Hospital in Kathmandu via a helicopter because of her condition.

Jyoti Devi Roka, 33, of Kalikot was flown to Kathmandu on 4 May due to post-partum complications, but died a week after returning home.

Recently, 32-year-old Devika Sachi from Lamjung was admitted to a hospital after an excessive bleeding. She was airlifted by the Nepal Army and taken to a Nepali Medical College, but the baby did not survive and she is in poor health afterwards.

Local Community News

PHOTO: HPMedia.com
We all yearn to breathe free

‘Americans are outspoken on human rights, not because we think they are perfect but because we know we are not’

L
ike so many others in Nepal, the United States, and around the world, I was shocked to hear the news. A series of publicised murders of black American men and women over the last two years. These events are particularly jarring for American citizens.

We recognize, with personal pain, that recent days have laid bare the many challenges that we are all called to confront. We invite all activists and labour organisations and women entrepreneurs. We encourage them to examine America’s history, take our conversations with our own human rights activism — those who confront our government — and to share civil rights movements in a way that respects the history of America’s continuing journey of self-improvement. As Americans do through the study of their own history, we welcome others to learn from our successes as well as our failures.

There is a reason that people in Nepal and all around the world know George Floyd’s name and know the history of racism in America. Our media is free, and we protect the rights of those who criticise our society and our government. We protect specifically the rights of those who criticise our society and our government, in the media, in the internet, and in the streets. We speak out — and will continue to do so — against those who attack peaceful protesters, whether abroad or at home.

The United States was born of a protest movement demanding abolishment of slavery, including peaceful assembly and freedom of expression. And peaceful protests demanding that our government live up to its own stated ideals throughout our history have made our country stronger.

That is why the gathering of bold women a century ago in Seneca Falls demanded, and achieved, voting equality. That is why the brave men and women who marched with Dr King in Selma to protest inequality and demand justice led to the adoption of Civil Rights legislation in the 1960s. That is why LGBT Americans, long criminalized and ostracized, refused systemic discrimination through protest at the Federal building in the United States that gave birth to the modern LGBT rights movement. And that is why today we protest Mr. Floyd’s death, condemn racism, and demand justice for all.

And that is why we continue to hold those ideals, those truths, to be self-evident: as we continue to work to improve our country, we will never be so estimable or entitled to assume that only Americans are entitled to such rights. Indeed, these rights are universal and not the province of a state to give or deny. Condemn racism and demand justice in America. But do so, too, in Nepal. For Dalits and women and ethnic minorities. For people who criticise Nepal’s government and Nepal’s society.

And not only in Nepal and America, Speak up for your fellow human beings regardless of nationality, religion, geography, or the system under which they work.

Randy Berry
The United States Ambassador to Nepal

Wealth in the interior

Nepali Airline is operating 40 repair flights for Nepali citizens stranded during Poker and fry some by the Ministry of Tourism. Omran’s budget in the Sam Rui has brought home

Reparation flights

Himalaya Airline and Nepal Airlines are operating 40 repair flights for Nepali citizens stranded at Pokhara airport and fry some by the Ministry of Tourism. Omran’s budget in the Sam Rui has brought home

Asian Paints

Asian Paints is a leading paint company. Asian Paints is a leading paint company. Asian Paints is a leading paint company. Asian Paints is a leading paint company.

Banking on banks

NCC Bank, one of the banks in Nepal, is offering 36% discounts while shopping for personal protection accessories, sanitary, infrared thermometers, surgical masks, gowns, face masks, and disinfectant sprays. The bank is also offering easy financing schemes at competitive fixed interest rates for customers to purchase laptops and PCs because of online services. Available for Acer, Asus, Dell and Apple computers.

Ncell

Ncell has partnered with the Ministry of Digital Technology and Communication to offer approved Ncell e-Payment. Customers can buy data packs from any Ncell e-Payment store, and on approved Ncell e-Payment. Customers can buy data packs from any Ncell e-Payment store, and on approved Ncell e-Payment. Customers can buy data packs from any Ncell e-Payment store, and on approved Ncell e-Payment. Customers can buy data packs from any Ncell e-Payment store, and on approved Ncell e-Payment. Customers can buy data packs from any Ncell e-Payment store.
Sustainable Summits 2020
Listen to Sustainable Summits, global leaders speak on a World Environment Day, SUSTAINABLE SUMMITS 2020. A POST COVID 19 WEED FROM THE TOP, an entire 45-minute programme in which some of the conference’s inspirational leaders share powerful messages on the future of our planet. Visit www.g뜨e.net to watch the stream.

Van Gogh Museum
See the works of Vincent Van Gogh up close; a virtual tour of Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, home to the largest collection of his artwork. The collection includes over 200 paintings, 500 drawings, and over 750 personal letters.

Global flea markets
Experience 9 of the world’s most exciting flea markets including France’s Les Puces de Saint-Ouen, India’s Atyans Tea Market, and London’s Portobello Market with this Google Earth virtual tour.

ONLINE ARCHIVES

Photowalk
Photowalk Nepal is organizing their first photowalk of the new Nepali calendar while observing the physical distancing guidelines. The walk will begin from Basantapur. 20 June, from winners: 9664909177, 9801785630.

Art Exhibition
On the occasion of World Refugee Day 2020, ArtIndia and UNHCR invite Nepalis 26 years or younger to send in photographs of their artwork. Selected ones will be exhibited on ArtIndia’s website and social media platforms. Deadline for submission is 25 June. Go to www.artindia.net for details on the theme and how to submit the artwork. 20-25 June, 9851813911, 9824899790.

Quarantine Dining
Cafe Somen Pick from Cafe Somen’s burgers and sandwiches served with potato wedges and coleslaw. Or get the beefsteak & Walnut salad as a healthier option. Delivery: 1pm-7:30pm, Jangalgate (01) 4633424, Bishalnagar (01) 4412769.

Dip in Donuts
Solidly fruit sweet tooth and choose from among varieties of doughnuts from blueberry and cream, coffee and crumble, or the classic cream. Choose from the menu on Foodmandu. Delivery: 10am-10pm.

Gangnam Galbi Barbeque
Tantalize your taste buds with the best of Korean barbecue and grill. Try the Sundae stew and duck tuck grill. Delivery: 1pm-7:30pm (01) 4634302.

Vera Pizza
Vera has your hot, cold and frozen worked. Try the artful pizza or the spicy basam. Find more options on Foodmandu. Delivery: 10am-10pm, 9880930007.

VAPE QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 12 - 18 June

ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI

KIRPA KOSHI

USE REUSABLE SHOPPING BAGS

Friday

Saturday

Sunday

For the first time since we started to publish the VAPE Quality Index (IQ) measured at the US Embassy in France, the average daily concentration of particles in the AIR was 100% on 20 June. The air is usually cleaner during the monsoon, but with the lockdown, the concentration of suspended particles in the air has also gone down. http://aq.ambhk.com/monitor/vape-quality-indec

Olive Garden
Urbanites are reaping the benefits of e-going greener while making it from threads and a sitting weekly for the entire duration for volunteering here, north of the Himalayas, which are for the most part wild and short vigorous. This year, the tough was proportioned by a big five huge campaign in the Americas every year and arrived among on school. Devoid deal with flower vanities and mostly right after the weekend.

Breakfast: 8am-10am, lunch: 12pm-3pm, dinner: 7pm-9pm, wine: 9pm-10pm.
Nepal farmer refuses to bury head in sand

Despite lockdown, entrepreneur invests in pioneering ostrich venture

Mukesh Pokhrel in Rupandehi

Despite the economic gloom and doom due to the coronavirus crisis, one farmer in Nepal’s southern plains is optimistically and adamantly pinning his hopes on an ostrich venture taking off when business returns to normal.

C P Sharma has always been a pioneering entrepreneur who saw great potential in farming at a time when most young Nepalis were leaving the land for salaried jobs in the city or overseas.

With its 1.6 billion in investments, Sharma is using the lockdown period to finish construction of Nepal’s first large-scale ostrich farm in Tilottama Municipality of Rupandehi. Integrated with a mushroom and strawberry farm, Sharma’s venture has a cold storage of 10,000 ton capacity.

“This is an integrated farm, and the cold storage will give us the flexibility to store produce for times when there is a shortage of items in the market,” explains Sharma, whose venture is already producing 3 tons of mushrooms daily, thereby creating jobs for at least 800 local people.

The venture has a lot of other downstream benefits: the ostrich farm needs commercially grown grass, which local farmers are growing as a cash crop to sell to Sharma.

C P Sharma graduated from Shankardav Campus in Kathmandu in 1987 and did his masters from Russia. Despite an option to remain abroad, he returned, brimming with ideas to create a viable agri-business that created employment and, in a small way, reversed the outmigration trend.

“After experiencing life abroad, I felt the urge to return to Nepal,” he says. “My relatives all live here and I wanted to work in my own country.”

The turning point came one day when he was traveling to America with a Japanese colleague. He was pulled aside to be questioned by US immigration officials, but his friend was permitted to pass through. After 45 minutes of questioning, he was finally cleared.

“It changed my whole outlook on life. I was no criminal, yet they treated me like one just because I came from a poor country,” Sharma recalls. “I decided to do what I could to live a dignified life in my own country.”

He returned to Nepal in 1995 and saw great potential in the fertile lands of the Tarai. He had seen ostrich farms in the Ukraine, and tasted the meat in upscale restaurants in Paris, and knew there would be demand for ostrich meat.

The MoU forced him to elaborate his plans for a few years, but he imported 1,000 ostrich eggs, of which 900 hatched and only 200 survived. Sharma was frustrated after realizing agriculture was not like any other business – it needed patience because of the risks and slow rate of return. His partners quit, but he decided to pursue his goal.

Being a visionary entrepreneur and more importantly, a passionate farmer, Sharma began working his way up to where he is today. His son has now returned from the United States to help in the family business. His wife, who is a physician, helps out when she can.

Besides ostrich, Sharma saw significant business potential in mushrooms. Nepalis consume 25 tons of mushroom daily, but much of the high-grade mushrooms are imported from India, China, Vietnam, and Thailand. Because of the shortage of fresh mushrooms, most hotels were using canned alternatives.

Before the coronavirus, Sharma was selling 3 tons of mushroom daily. His plans of ultimately producing four times more may have to be postponed because of the collapse of the tourism industry.

One of the by-products of his integrated farm is high-grade compost consisting of ostrich manure, straw, wheat husk, and sugarcane skin. The compost is used by farmers who grow the commercial grass on which the ostriches feed.

The global pandemic may have slowed business, but Sharma is confident the economy will bounce back and that many Nepalis will also be returning with fresh ideas and expertise from abroad.

He says, “Many of my friends who settled abroad are now planning to return to Nepal. I hope I have shown that it is possible to do well in Nepal, too.”

BIRD MAN: C P Sharma, posing at his integrated ostrich farm in Rupandehi this week. This farm has created employment for 800 locals.

REFLECTS SAFETY IN ALL WAYS
TATA NEXON, THE SAFEST SUV

The clouds are lifting

Joy Stephens in Myagdi

At first glance, 87-year-old Bal Bir Bisiwakarma looks like millions of other Nepalis – a poor and illiterate subsistence farmer. There is nothing in his clothes, his one-room house, and the way he abides in his courtyard, that indicates what an extraordinary life he has lived.

Yet, he had been born with a different name, or in a different country, he might now be a celebrity on the speaker circuit, a successful business tycoon, or someone may have made a movie about his life.

I am meeting him to discuss how to get some benefits from tourism trickling down to his village of Lukan in Dhaulagiri Rural Municipality amidst the craggy mountains of Central Nepal.

“We live in the shadow of Dhaulagiri, but tourists don’t come here,” Bal Bir explains, in a soft and dignified voice. “Several people in our village are licensed trekking guides, but they can’t find employment. A few go to Jomsom and hang around the airfield for portering work, but the competition is intense and they are paid a pittance. So they are forced to go abroad as migrant labourers.”

We chat in the veranda of his house. From the ridge above, we see a vista of snow-capped peaks of the Dhaulagiri Range, and the serrated outlines of forested ridges fading away one after another into lighter shades of blue in the distant haze.

“I’ve done a bit of guiding myself,” he admits modestly. Bal Bir was no ordinary guide. He was a sirdar for mountaineering expeditions in the Himalayas. But like most Nepalis, he is a master of understatement and plays down his accomplishments.

As the head of high altitude porters, his job was to get expedition supplies to Base Camp and from there to the highest camps. He describes how, in the days before roads, the trek to base camps could take two weeks or more, and he would be responsible for over a hundred porters and their loads during these treks. It was a major logistical and financial responsibility.

“Piling the stories out of Bal Bir is like extracting teeth. He is not one to blow his own trumpet. Slowly, I learn that he has been to the top of Mt Lhotse. He has climbed the Tukuche Peak, where he has planted the flag of an exhausted foreigner he was guiding.

He has climbed the majestic Churup Himal, visible from above his village to the northeast on the border with Dolpo. There, he was once caught in an avalanche and badly injured. He had to be stretchered 7 days to Pokhara (two helicopter rescue in those days) and spent three months in hospital.

The stories go on – I learn that Bal Bir has even been to the United States, spending six months there at the invitation of an American climber. The highlight of his trip was not cruising down the interstate highways, but rock climbing in Wyoming.

Why is this man, who should be a national treasure for having accomplished so much and helped so many, facing a poverty-stricken Retirement in a poverty-stricken village up in the mountains? Why has he not been able to capitalize on his skills and experience?

While there may be many contributory factors; the biggest stumbling block is that Bal Bir was born into a poor Dalit family in western Nepal, where caste-based discrimination remains at the heart of conservative societies, despite more education and awareness.

Growing up, Bal Bir learned about his people’s place in society, the rules he had to follow for being from an ‘untouchable’ caste. To be successful in business requires not only financial capital but also social capital (apno manchhu) – the network of influential people who have decision-making power in the world of business and politics in Nepal.

Bal Bir might have been to America, but in Nepal he is a nobody. He is a Dalit, he is poor, he is from a remote far-flung village, and he is illiterate.

Lukan is not only a neglected far-away village, but its 300 households are all Dalit. Their combined financial and social capital, and self-esteem, are close to zero.

For centuries of Nepal’s feudal past, it has been a hopeless situation. Things should have changed after 1990 when Nepal restored democracy, and the country became a constitutional monarchy. Things should have changed after the Maoists waged a war to liberate the downtrodden, and Dalits picked up the gun to join the militia, many sacrificing their lives to end the injustice to their people.

But nothing changed.

Now, a ray of sunshine has broken through the clouds in Dhaulagiri Rural Municipality. What democracy and an armed struggle has not been able to achieve is beginning to happen with political devolution through Nepal’s new federal constitution.

After elections to all three levels of government in 2017, the new federal system is flexing its muscles and showing how it can sweep away the cobwebs of old power networks. People from under-served communities have begun to take charge.

The very first decision taken by Dhaulagiri municipality was to ignore the power centre in the bazar town and select the village of Mina, higher up the mountain close to Lukan, as its headquarter. This was revolutionary because at that time Mina had no road, no telecommunication. But the site was carefully chosen because the local government was within a day’s walk of every citizen in every ward of the municipality.

To appreciate the significance of this decision to move, it is necessary to understand something of the demography and history of the cluster of villages in the rural municipality. Its population of 7,000 consists predominantly of Majar, Chantyal and Dalit families living in scattered villages clinging to steep mountain sides, with some Ghetel, Brahmin, and others in the lower reaches.

Of particular interest is the high number of Dalit households. Overall, in Nepal, they represent 13% of the population, but in the Myagdi District, they comprise 24% and in the Dhaulagiri Rural Municipality, they make up 35%. It was the copper mines and the processing of copper ore which attracted such large numbers of Dalits to this mountainous area during the 19th century. The Chantyal did the mining, while Bisiwakarma metalworkers purified the ore into ingots which were carried down
Far away from cynical and pessimistic Kathmandu, federalism brings hope to a remote Nepal village

Post-lockdown Lulang

When tourism picks up again after Nepal opens up after the lockdown, visitors may want to venture off the beaten track to the wilderness of western Mustang. This is what Nepal was like before tourism took off, and there are now efforts to build a network of homestays so the income from trekking stays in the homes of people.

Lulang, on the south slope of a pass leading up to Dhorpatan, is a village made up of Dalti whose families have set up homestays. One of them is Ral Bhaya Biru Banskota, chair of the local Tourism Committee—a position doubly remarkable because not only is she a Dalti, but also a woman.

"People respect me more because they see that I have a steady income from my room," says Ral Bhaya.

Most trekkers to Nepal are not aware of the caste discrimination that is still prevalent in Nepal. Dalits have not been able to benefit proportionately from tourism because they are not usually hired by trekking agencies. If they are, it is usually for the lowest paid jobs of portering.

Trekking was already a seasonal occupation, and now with the collapse of tourism, even that source of income is gone.

Fair Trade is a mode of trekking that tries to make sure that porters are hired locally to income stays in the village. It also puts an emphasis on respecting the local culture and the environment—similar to how the fair-trade label on foodstuff guarantees that the producer is exploitation free, and is not harmful to the environment.

Nepal can move to a better normal with an improved model of trekking that benefits the most under-served communities. Post lockdown, just such a piece could be the Dhaulagiri Rural Municipality and its network of homestays.
“I care how Nepal is presented on the world stage”

I am an award-winning Nepali journalist with over five years of experience leading CNN International’s satellite TV coverage from New Delhi, Hong Kong, and Singapore. My current posting is in New Delhi, as CNN’s South Asia correspondent covering significant events in the region, including the epicentre of earthquakes, the country’s seismic crisis, and the city’s pollution and climate issues. I am currently the Executive Director of the Lumbini Museum Initiative.

Recently, I tweeted: “In a world of alternative facts India has made Limpymptha, Lajpat Rai and Kalapani their “fact” it would be prudent for the Indian media to stop gaslighting Nepal with its patronizing preconceived narratives.”

Sumanita Udall spoke to Nepal Times about the state of media in the age of populist authoritarianism.

Nepal Times: Your tweet. It took an unusually strong line on India’s claim to Nepal’s territory.

Sumanita Udall: I wrote that tweet because I was disturbed by the way in which the Indian media was covering the story, as if it were an indispensable fact that those three areas belonged to it. Politically, it is a shrewd strategy, allowing them to begin the debate from a position of strength, even though their argument may be based on an alternative fact set of half-truth.

This is a trick often used by President Trump. I use the term “gaslighting” to describe their approach. It means to psychologically manipulate so one question a person’s perception of reality. The Nepali media may have had all the facts on its side, historically and geographically, yet I’ve been myself second-guessing our version of history, questioning if this was, in fact, Nepal’s. Why didn’t we say anything for all these years? And while those questions still remain, the truth still remains.

I also did not agree with the patronising tone of their coverage. When a General G D Bakshi glowingly reported that Nepal is “India’s most important neighbour, a small brother, not big bro” etc., we may facetiously and the bias, but the usage of such terms is commonly used as to lowering Germany. Germany doesn’t call Switzerland a small brother, nor does US call Mexico a small sister. We shouldn’t be called small brother. Each and every nation has its own space and small, that will be our reality, it is how we imagine the positioning of our country.

The Indian media has a tendency to define Nepali journalists were peddling a preconceived narrative from South Block. Both broadcast and print media from Republic TV to the Hindustan Times reported the story as if the area was always India’s and that the Nepali leadership was needlessly irritating its “big brother” for its own political gains, or as the Indian Army General put it: “it’s a small country.” Simplifying the story in this manner worked for the Indian audience which drastically seems obsessed with China. Unfortunately, the media is making a mistake in insecurity, but it was hugely misleading.

You yourself have hosted studio interviews with world leaders and celebrities. What are some of your guiding principles?

I produced CNN’s flagship weekly talk show called Talk Asia for 10 years, based out of Hong Kong. Every week we would profile newsmakers from Bill Clinton to Shinya Abe to Timur Tatar to Roger Federer, Jack Ma to Lady Gaga. Unlike many other interview shows, particularly in India, the purpose of our interviews was never to advance an agenda, to influence opinion in Nepal for our benefit. I often feel journalists ask questions in an unyielding, pushy, and obnoxious manner that can then be fed back to the political or business leaders. We are often confused as to how to report that against the current government’s storyline. As someone who has interviewed people from all over India and India, I am shocked and dismayed to see how a bias can even be nullified so quickly.

And how has this high demand content of TV networks changed Nepal’s political and media landscape?

Debate is dead, in India. Journalists have discovered that the snubbing and more outrageous the debates, the more flattering for everyone’s back, as they do not engage in debate, as the space for discussion and argument is emerging as the key to the political. But would someone in Bolivia care about this story in Nepal? I tried very hard to engage in a very small, but I was disappointed of course. The neoliberal way in which the Western media often covers the East is not only just on personal pet go. As Nepal, or even India, we often see the international media as a gold standard that we must try to emulate. I’m not sure they are the perfect either. They have their limitations, they have their own world views and biases.

How should journalism deal with the rise of populist authoritarian leaders and their manipulation of social media?

The role of a journalist is to be a voice for the citizens, and to hold power accountable. Whether you are questioning the government, the police, the school leaders or the media itself. As we see the rise of more authoritarian leaders, particularly in these days of populist nationalism, the need for the media is one that is very independent and true is even more vital. The main challenge now for many journalists is how to deal with the network or publication that has clear political allegiance is to stay true to one’s core purpose.

In countries like the United States, having leaders like Donald Trump is not so worrying because other institutions such as the judiciary, legislature and the media remain strong. But in India, the fact that those institutions can be placed to put in place to promote state power has been dramatically weakened is a serious concern.

Thankfully, we are now seeing an increase in more independent online portals even though they may not have the mainstream reach. The exponential growth of social media and its ability to mobilise public opinion has also changed the dynamic not only the media, but the business and political landscape.

Traditionally, truth was the most important thing. Now, perception or perception of reality has also changed. We see much more media and led by social media. Social media has its drawbacks of course. In the news and click bait journalism, but it is much more, much more informed, more aware, more wise.