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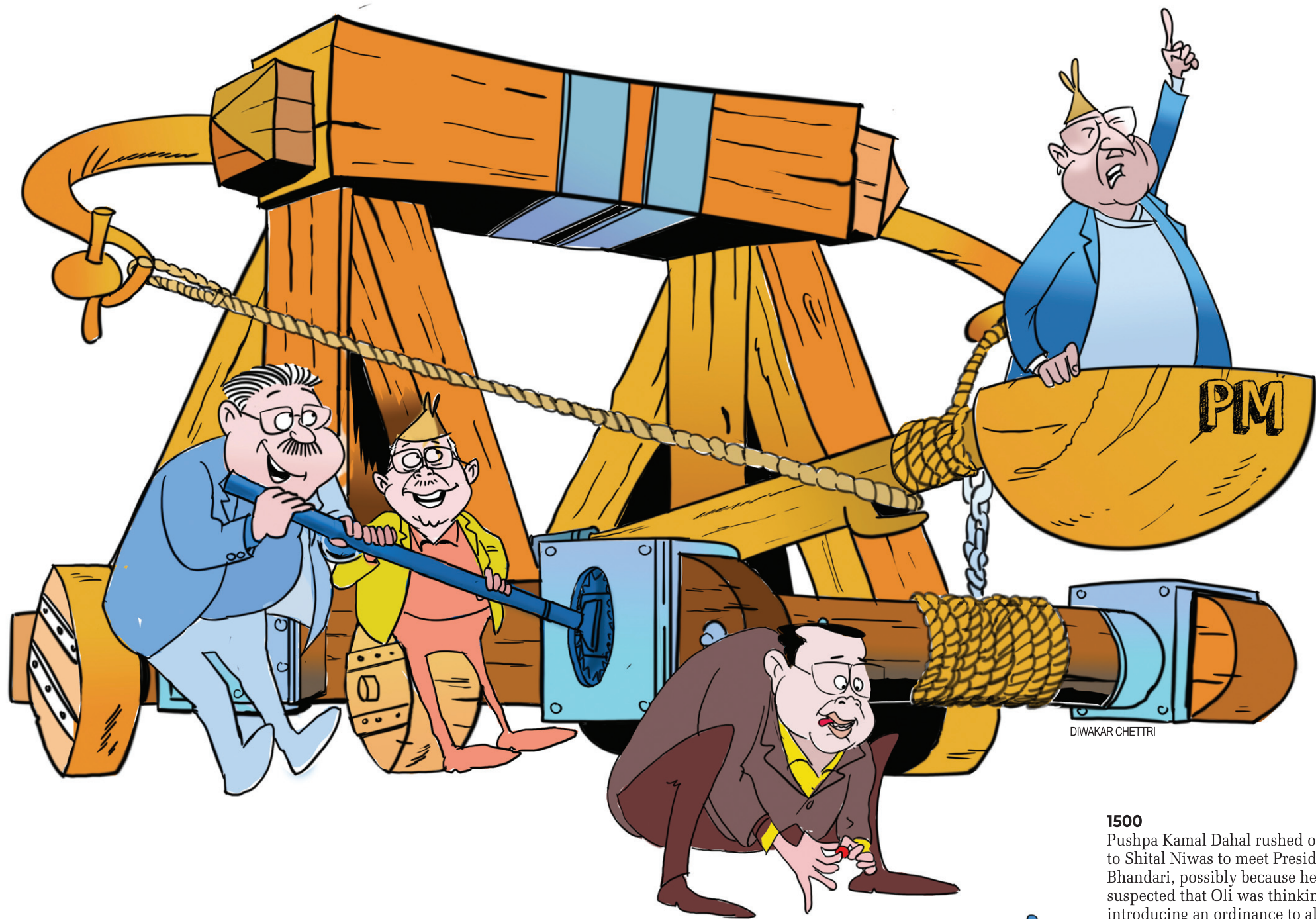
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DIWAKAR CHHETTRI

Catapult from power

The political crisis in Kathmandu has displaced COVID-19 from the headlines. The fast-paced developments on Thursday indicated that the power struggle within the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) was finally reaching a denouement. It also showed that Prime Minister K P Oli, who is under pressure from the Pushpa Kamal Dahal faction to resign, is not stepping down without a fight.

This hour-by-hour account of the hectic political maneuverings on Thursday, 2 July:

0900

Supporters of Prime Minister K P Oli drive to NCP party executive chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal's residence in Khumaltar. Among them were ex-Speaker Subhas Nembang, Defence Minister Ishwor Pokhrel, Foreign Minister Pradeep

Gyawali, Province 5 Chief Minister Shankar Pokhrel, adviser Bishnu Rimal, and Gandaki Province Chief Minister Prithvi Subba Gurung. Their main agenda was to try to defuse the confrontation between Dahal and Oli, and to stave off a crisis.

1000

Across town, the Madhav Kumar Nepal faction of the NCP was meeting at his residence in Koteswor to continue to demand that K P Oli step down both as Prime Minister and party chair, a demand reinforced in a joint meeting with Dahal supporters on Wednesday night at the Jhamel restaurant, Ageno.

1100

Prime Minister K P Oli drives from Baluwater to meet President Bidya Devi Bhandari at her official residence in Maharjanj to reportedly brief her about his plans to prorogue

the budget session of Parliament. Although President Bhandari has a neutral and ceremonial role, she is believed to be a strong Oli supporter.

1130

A pro-government rally is held at Mandala by youth supporting Prime Minister Oli with slogans like 'No Toppling the Government'.

1200

At high noon, Prime Minister Oli calls an emergency Cabinet meeting, where he proposes that the budget session be ended because it was not safe for such a large gathering during the pandemic. He also argued that the two agenda on the table, MCC and citizenship bill, both needed further debate. Cabinet readily agreed, and Parliament ended its session at 1700hrs.

1230

President Bhandari officially announces the end of the budget session of Parliament. Interestingly, Speaker Agni Sapkota, a close ally of Dahal, reportedly had no idea that the House session had been ended.

1300

On the other side of Baluwater, the NCP's Standing Committee members were gathering for the scheduled meeting. But when the prime minister did not show up, and they heard about the Cabinet decision to end the House session, they dispersed. Madhav Kumar Nepal, Jhalnath Khanal and Pushpa Kamal Dahal were seen in a huddle outside.

1400

Prime Minister Oli and his supporters met Pushpa Kamal Dahal in a last ditch attempt to iron out their differences.

1500

Pushpa Kamal Dahal rushed off to Shital Niwas to meet President Bhandari, possibly because he suspected that Oli was thinking of introducing an ordinance to allow the NCP to split. A new UML party was registered on Wednesday.

1600

Dahal returned to Baluwater to rejoin the Standing Committee which was then postponed till Saturday.

It is still unclear whether Dahal and Oli have patched up their differences for now. It is possible that Oli has threatened to split off from the NCP with his followers if the Dahal faction insists on him giving up both posts.

There is a trust deficit between the two because Oli had agreed in March to divide up the party functions, and make Dahal executive chair of the party. However, in reality Oli kept control of both the party and government, hence the demand for one-person-one-post. But in last week's Standing Committee meeting the Dahal faction demanded that Oli step down from both positions.

Insiders say that if Pushpa Kamal Dahal takes over as prime minister, Oli may insist on being the party chair.

BOW OUT
EDITORIAL
PAGE 2

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Bow out

Jhala Nath Khanal as well as Bhim Rawal and Bamdev Gautam. For his part, Oli wooed former Maoists by giving them ministerial berths in his Cabinet.

The wily Oli had become dominant by riding a nationalist wave following the Indian blockade, and keeps resorting to that formula when he is politically cornered. Which is what he did in the ‘war of the maps’ against India last month over the Limpiyadhura dispute.

With his back against the wall as the rebellion spread within the NCP, he deliberately escalated the dispute with India to buy time. It worked. Not only did that defuse the crisis, but he even got unprecedented unity across party lines to back Nepal’s claim to the piece of territory occupied by India.

But the respite was short-lived. At the Standing Committee meeting that began last week, Oli’s rivals within his party had come better prepared, and wanted him to step down forthwith. The prime minister’s reflex, again, was to accuse them of being manipulated by New Delhi to unseat him. It didn’t work.

Oli is now isolated within the NCP Secretariat, the Standing Committee and the Parliamentary Party, and has run out of cards to play. If he is desperate enough, he has up the ante again against India, split the party and form a coalition with the opposition NC, dissolve Parliament and go for mid-term elections. None of these are in the national interest.

The main criticism against Oli from within the NCP is ‘he never listens to us’ – this in Nepal is a euphemism for ‘he never made us ministers’. However, the anti-Oli faction is using his poor governance record over the past two-and-half years, and especially the poor handling of the COVID-19 lockdown, to mask what is essentially an epic power struggle.

We cannot completely discount Oli yet. He seems to be behind the move to re-register the old UML party, which means he is willing to split the unified NCP to go it alone. There is lot of precedent for this in the Nepali Congress and UML in recent Nepali history. When his position was shaky in April, Oli himself nearly passed a party split ordinance in April to accommodate the Madhesi parties.

It is counter-productive to antagonise India, and it goes against Nepal’s national doctrine of keeping the balance between our giant neighbours. What does not inspire much hope is that Oli’s would-be successors are all TTFs (tried, tested, failed) from the past. Which is why the youth are out on the streets, they have seen them all.

The best option for the ailing Oli now is to bow out. He can carry out the peculiarly Communist practice of public self-criticism, give up one of his posts, keep the party intact, and let the government handle the medical, economic, social emergencies caused by the global pandemic.

What does not inspire much hope is that Oli’s would-be successors are all TTFs (tried, tested, failed) from the past.

Politics is supposed to be a mechanism through which the most competent leaders are selected to manage a nation state for a time-bound period. The selection is made by election, so that the candidates who show most promise through stated goals or performance get voted to power and gain legitimacy.

But politics often degenerates into a cynical game of attaining and retaining power. Having power then becomes an end in itself, with no larger goal. And if the stakes are high enough, some will use violence to attain that power. History is replete with massacres, assassinations, wars and revolutions aimed at regime change by force.

In Nepal, barely six years after the pro-democracy street protests turned the king into a constitutional monarch, the Maoist faction of the Nepal Communist Party got so impatient for power that it waged an armed struggle. Stalemated with the army ten years later at great human cost, the Maoists signed a ceasefire, contested two elections, won and lost, and then merged with the centre-left UML in 2017 under the new Constitution.

In the past two-and-half years the NCP has been in power, there has been constant jostling between the two main leaders in the party: Prime Minister K P Oli and co-Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal. Like all alpha males may beat their chests and talk tough, both are deeply insecure about their positions and fear public distrust.

Dahal got former UML leaders who never liked Oli anyway over to his side, including ex-prime ministers Madhav Kumar Nepal and

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

10 years ago this week, Madhav Kumar Nepal had just resigned from prime ministership and no one saw him as a political threat. His biggest achievement was to prevent a complete Maoist takeover a year earlier. A decade later he has sided with Pushpa Kamal Dahal and his faction is a kingmaker in the battle between the two alpha males of the ruling party: a proof that there are no permanent friends and enemies in politics. Excerpt from the Publisher’s Note in issue #509:

In the past year, Madhav Nepal’s biggest contribution was to keep the totalitarian ambitions of the Maoists at bay. It is only now becoming clear how close we came on the night of 4 May 2009 to a complete Maoist takeover. Now, Nepal has shown that he also knows when it is time to go, unlike many of his peers.

But by surprising even his close aides with the announcement of his resignation, Nepal seized the moment, wrested the initiative and took the moral high ground ahead of the UML central committee meeting.



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BURMA-NEPAL

In Myanmar, Burmese and Gurkha people are living in peaceful coexistence (‘After 60 years, Nepalis still miss Burma’, Mukesh Pokhrel, #1016). Especially in Pyin Oo Lwin, the two communities are living altogether.

Thu Rain

■ Though I was in Burma during some of the difficult times, from 1988 to 1992, it was my best experience living away from home. I never felt like I was in a foreign land.

Suresh Pradhan

COVID AND CONFLICT

They must not get into confrontation to divert their people’s attention away from their governments’ domestic failures (‘View of Galwan from Bhutan’, Passang Dorji, nepalitimes.com).

Krishna Joshi

■ Every government want to ignore their failure in fighting COVID-19 from their people (‘The geopolitics of the Himalayan border posts’, Dipak Gurung, nepalitimes.com). This is why every country is in conflict.

Mohit Bhardwaj

ORWELLIAN WORLD

If 1984 and Animal Farm were combined to make one story, it’d perfectly match our times (‘Nepal’s Communists more equal than others’, nepalitimes.com).

Keshab Pathak

LOCUSTS IN NEPAL

Very important read to keep in perspective (‘Locusts invading Nepal are more flighty’, Mukesh Pokhrel, nepalitimes.com). Seemingly they not invading Nepal. So no immediate devastating threat as feared.

Garry De La Pomerai

APPLES IN THE TARAI

Plants can be grown everywhere in the natural environment by developing adaptability (‘Growing apples on a war-footing’, Mukesh Pokhrel, #1016). Rice can grow in the desert, apple, lemon and orange in the Tarai, yarsagumba in Kathmandu valley. Modern agriculture has different dimensions.

BÀIREN Agro Consultant and Traders

■ Self-sustaining farming is the way to go. With information technology, anything is possible. If Israel can grow crops in the deadest and hottest desert on earth, Nepal can too.

Gyurme Dondup

■ This is awesome. Organic farming where people said it wasn’t possible.

Beyond The Clouds

■ Maybe with a little help from government (don’t hold your breath), Nepal could easily become self sufficient in feeding itself and also exporting!

Alan Roadnight

■ Good inspiration for Nepali youth here.

Ngawang Tenzin

ANDES AND HIMALAYAS

The Andes and Himalaya have the same type of attitudinal variations (‘The Andes and Himalaya join hands’, Lorena Gómez Ramírez and Bibek Raj Shrestha, #1016). So they should now join hands in exchanging their crops too.

Gauri Rimal

RISE AND FALL OF RICE

We could be self-sufficient in rice by not selling arable land for unplanned housing projects and irresponsible land ownership (‘The rise of rice in Nepal’, Krishna Dev Joshi and Santosh Upadhaya, #1016). Kathmandu Valley was full of paddy fields. People have turned it all into concrete jungle and we wonder why we are not self sufficient in rice?

Deo Prakash Lama

COVID-19 TEST KITS

Not all Chinese products are bad (‘Why Nepal lags in COVID-19 testing’, Ramu Sapkota, nepalitimes.com). If the PCR mix itself was tampered the test could give a false result. Proper storage is also key. There are many places where PCR could go wrong. It takes a lot of trial and error to figure out new instruments.

Kala Tamang

UNLOCKING NEPAL

Illuminating words of nature rejoicing while humans cringe in the shadows of life (‘Ode on unlocking’, Lisa Choegyal, page 3).

Devendra Basnet

■ Love the repetition. Love the noticing of beauty amidst the loss. Isn’t that just the way?

Laurie Marks Wagner

■ One of your best columns ever Lisa. Forge onwards!

Brian Peniston

Nepali Times.com

WHAT’S TRENDING



Angur Baba Joshi, 89

Angur Baba Joshi was a Nepali educationist and social worker who was way ahead of her time. The tribute celebrating Joshi’s life and times was widely shared on social media with well-wishers sending in their heartfelt condolences.

Most reached and shared on Facebook

Lockdown puts Nepal’s media in intensive care

by Raju Baskota

COVID-19 has pushed Nepal’s already-struggling mass media to the brink of collapse. This comes at a time when the media needs to be strong to protect press freedom and act as a check and balance in democracy. An overview at nepalitimes.com.

Most popular on Twitter

After 60 years, Nepalis still miss Burma

by Mukesh Pokhrel

A coup d’état in Burma saw mass expulsion of Nepalis who had been living there for generations following the end of WWII. Over half a century later, Nepalis reminisce the land so strikingly similar to Tarai plains of Nepal in this most popular report of the week.

Most visited online page



Growing apples on a war-footing

by Mukesh Pokhrel

Rejected by the British Army, Asha Gurung turned to farming career, which took him to Germany to train in organic agriculture. With his expertise, he has now proven the experts wrong by growing special ‘nano apples’ in the hot plains of Nepal. Read feedback in our website.

Most commented

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
In 2004 a tiger gouged out Bhadaï Tharu’s left eye. Today he is an award-winning #tiger conservationist. In 2010 he was even paid a visit by actor and environmentalist @LeoDiCaprio who took off his shades and gifted it to Tharu after their chat. #Nepal



Bardia Homestay @Bardiahomestay
Persons who were victims of #tigerattacks in #bardianationalpark still fight for #tigerconservation! #Nepal



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Following the sharp drop in #revenue due to the #COVID19 lockdown, #massmedia in #Nepal is facing an existential crisis. How are newspapers, digital portals, televisions and radio stations across the nation surviving this pandemic? An overview @rajunews.



Chun B. Gurung @Chun_Gurung
The media sector employs up to 200k ppl, & if there is no rescue package half of them will lose their jobs as the annual Rs8 billion turnover in the advertising sector is down by 80%



Bisnu sharma @sharmabishnu
Nepali media is facing huge financial crisis amid this Covid-19 lockdown. One lakh plus media persons will lose their job, Media society says. Must read piece by @NepaliTimes



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
American biotech company plans to find possible treatment for #COVID-19 by studying the DNA in the blood samples of #Nepal’s Sherpa people. Find out why this has raised ethical issues @Sonamfuti:



Yadav Uprety @upretyy
Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) is prerequisite for Sherpas. Benefit sharing mechanisms should be negotiated based on Mutually Agreed Terms (MAT).

Gorkhas on the frontline between India and China

Nepal is literally caught in the middle in the border confrontation between its two huge neighbours

Pratistha Rijal

A clash between Indian and Chinese troops at Ladakh’s Galwan Valley on 15 June rocked the dynamics between the world’s two most populous nuclear powers. But it also drew attention to the involvement of soldiers from Nepal in the Indian Army.

The violence, in which 20 soldiers on the Indian side and an unknown number of Chinese troops were killed, raised questions about the geopolitical balance in South Asia — an already volatile region wracked by COVID-19.

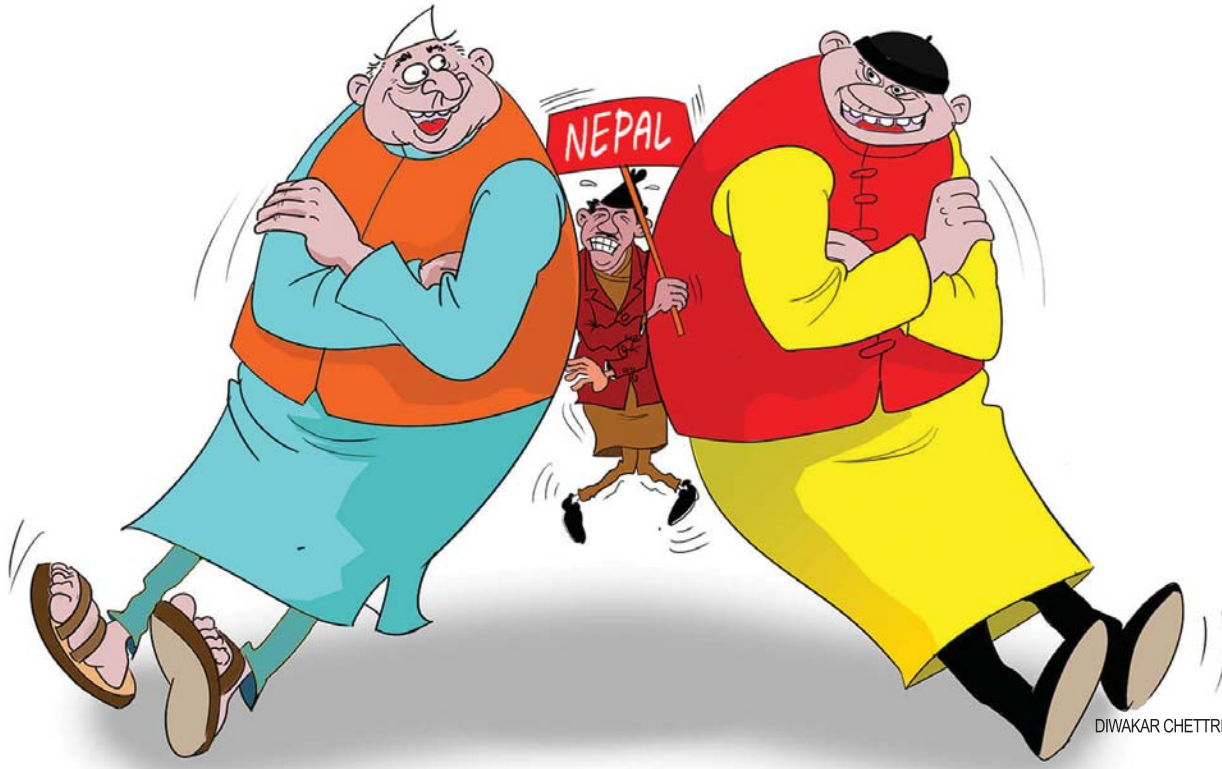
Nepal’s own border dispute with India over Limpiyadhura roughly coincided with the Galwan Valley clash, and was followed by Indian Army Chief Gen Manoj Mukund Naravane’s comment that Nepal was “acting at the behest of someone else” — meaning China.

But Nepal has even more at stake in India’s disputes with China and Pakistan — there are over 30,000 Gorkha troops in the Indian army, many of them deployed in frontline positions along their borders.

The poorly demarcated ‘Line of Actual Control’ that separates India and China has caused major clashes to break out at least three times after 1962. The confrontation this month was the most serious yet.

There is no official breakdown of the numbers of Gorkhas in the Indian Army who died in the Sino-Indian War of 1962 along the Himalaya, but an estimated 2,000 soldiers on the Indian side were killed. Of the 4,000 Indian Army POWs, an estimated 700 were Gorkha troops.

Although no Nepalis were killed in the Galwan Valley clash, soldiers who had come home to Nepal on leave were hastily recalled earlier this month to join troop transport at the border. They



had to travel there from Palpa, Syangja and other districts despite the lockdown.

Last week, a Nepali soldier in the Indian Army, Dilip Karki from Gulmi, was killed in an exchange of gunfire on the India-Pakistan border in Jammu and Kashmir — the latest fatality among Nepal’s frontline troops in India.

After the ‘war of the maps’, India and Nepal have both committed to de-escalate the Limpiyadhura dispute through talks, but Nepal’s Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali says India has not responded to several diplomatic letters asking for negotiations to begin.

Prime Minister K P Oli’s statement on Sunday, in which he accused India of trying to topple him, may have been meant to distract attention from problems within his

own party, but it will not help clear the air with Delhi.

Nor will an interview in which Defence Minister Ishwar Pokhrel said the Indian Army Chief had hurt the sentiments of Nepal’s Gorkha soldiers who “lay down their lives to protect India”.

The nuances of this sensitive geopolitical triangle between India, Nepal and China are aptly summarised in a recent tweet by Ashok Swain Indian Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies at Uppsala University in Sweden: ‘The Galwan Valley was saved for India from China in 1962 War by Nepali Gorkha soldiers, under Naik Subedar Jung Bahadur Gurung! The same Galwan Valley has been taken over by China in the same week when Modi engaged in a bitter land dispute with Nepal.’

One of the demands of

Nepal’s Maoists when they were underground and fighting the monarchy was to stop British and Indian recruitment of Nepalis into their militaries.

“Various factions of the left movement of Nepal have time and again called for the stopping of the Gurkha recruitment. They cite the fact that Nepali citizens are hired to fight someone else’s war,” explains Nishchal Nath Pandey at the Centre for South Asian Studies.

Although the reasoning for the termination of Gurkha recruitment may make sense, it will be unpopular in Nepal’s hinterland where the recruit takes place. Remittances and pensions from soldiers abroad form an important slice of Nepal’s economy.

In 2017, the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defense Studies and

Analyses in India estimated that Indian Gorkha regiments remit \$1 billion a year to Nepal, with pensions and arrears making up another \$800million.

It may be an anachronism for nationals of one country fighting and dying for another, especially when they are one side of a confrontation with another friendly neighbour. But Nepal’s rulers appear to have calculated that the country cannot afford to lose remittances from the Indian and British Armies, especially when the economy is down due to the pandemic.

Bhaskar Koirala at the Nepal Institute for Strategic Studies flags another issue: “If the NCP insists that Nepalis should not be allowed to enlist in Gorkha regiments in India, they should publicly say Gurkha recruitment should also not take place into the British military.”

But he doubts the recruitment into the British Army’s Brigade of the Gurkhas will be stopped. He adds: “Gurkhas are an international icon of Nepal and they should be treated as such. They are not a political card that can be manipulated and traded and dealt by politicians in Kathmandu.”

Meanwhile, many in India see Nepal as now being firmly in the China camp, while the Nepal government has not done enough to allay that view. In fact, with Oli’s statement on Sunday that India is conspiring to remove him from power has reinforced it.

Experts say Nepal must adhere firmly to one of its important foreign policy pillars — equal and friendly ties with both giant neighbours and a peaceful settlement of disputes.

The India-China border dispute could be Nepal’s chance to solidify its role as an intermediate power, fixing strained relationships with India and making headway with China, thereby getting on the good side of both the Asian hegemons. 🇳🇵

Right climate for India-China talks on climate change

Countries with the world’s largest carbon footprints need to pick up where they left off on climate negotiations

Rastraraj Bhandari

One of the casualties of the strain in relations between India and China will be the cooperation between the two of the world’s most populous countries on the climate crisis.

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping, Sino-Indian relations had actually improved with the two leaders having met multiple times since Modi came to power in India in 2014.

Modi’s visit to Xian in 2015 saw a breakthrough in bilateral relations, with the signing of 24 agreements ranging from economic and infrastructure development and military co-operation. Among the agreements signed were the ‘Memorandum of Understanding on Co-operation in Ocean Sciences, Climate Change and Cryosphere’ and the ‘MoU on Co-operation in Earthquake Science and Engineering.

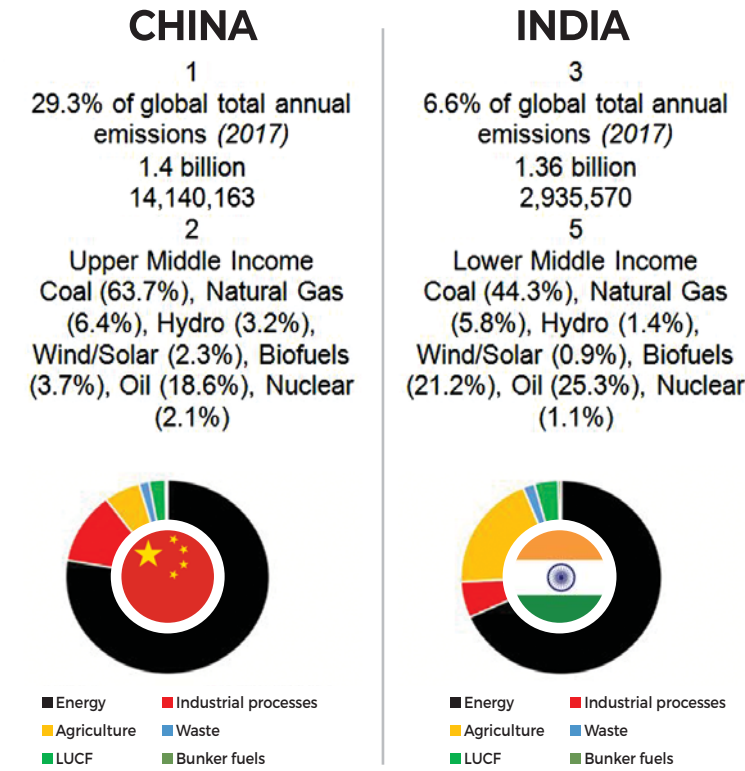
But even while the two sides seem to have taken measures to de-escalate tensions along their disputed border, a new cold war has set in over the Himalaya just a time when the mountain range is thawing because of the impact of climate change.

One-third of the ice on the Himalaya would be gone by 2050 and two-thirds by the end of the century if measures are not taken to cut global emissions, studies show.

Although the specific details of the Xian MoUs between India and China are not available, they were taken as positive signs in that both countries recognise the climate crisis to be a pressing challenge in the region in the coming years. It was also an indirect acknowledgement of the fact that the two countries together produce one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions — China 28% and India 7%.

But both countries also share common climate vulnerabilities such as depleting water resources, weather extremes resulting in floods and droughts, extreme heat stress, and rising sea levels. Ironically, the very mountainous border both are fighting over is also Asia’s water tower, and Himalayan glaciers are the source of major rivers in India, China, and the rest of Asia.

The China–India agreements on climate change were



perhaps the strongest agreements and bilateral networks between the two countries and provide a salient case study on what the future of collaboration between China and India could look like.

In 2001, the United States withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol, much like its withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement in 2016. Both led to a vacuum in international climate governance. With help from the European Union, China and India negotiated through the BASIC Group (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China) to come up with a joint climate agenda.

However, tensions soon emerged within the BASIC group. While India was praised for the newfound role of a mediator, China was seen as a bully in climate negotiations by the international community. The two countries also differed their own positions on points like emissions reduction targets and peaking of emissions.

Things started going downhill after that. In 2014, President Xi signed a joint climate agreement with then President Obama which formalised the rift between India and China. As a response to China’s joint agreement with the US, Prime Minister Modi said: “India will not be arm-twisted

Before the Conference of Parties (COP15) negotiations in Copenhagen, China and India took early steps to develop more coordination within the group to come up with a common position that would serve their national interests. In 2009, the two countries met in Beijing to sign an agreement to coordinate their approach to climate negotiations.

In Copenhagen in 2009, the BASIC Group got a boost by being recognised as a negotiation group of emerging economies. Its members were hailed for salvaging the conference by brokering the Copenhagen Accord with the United States at the very last minute despite criticism of leading a non-transparent and exclusionary decision-making process.

into climate action going against its national interest just on account of other countries.”

Although China and India presently do not have any official alliance on climate, they continue to share large carbon emissions profiles, vulnerabilities to climate change, and the common interest for energy-resilience.

The energy sector in both countries is following similar trajectories. China is the largest greenhouse gas emitter in the world, with India at number 3 behind the United States. China’s carbon emission from the energy sector is expected to decline after peaking in 2030, while India is taking action to curb coal consumption and the associated problem of air pollution. The two countries also have a shared interest in reducing their dependence on imported fossil fuels and to promote national energy security.

To do so, solar energy has emerged as a key interest in both countries. China is now the largest manufacturer of solar systems in the world. India has also pursued policies promoting initiatives like the International Solar Alliance, and to drive down the costs of solar power and increase its share in the energy grid.

The 2019 meeting between President Xi and Prime Minister Modi in Chennai had generated tangible results and was supposed to have opened a new chapter in bilateral relations. The informal meeting mechanism also was a chance to put territorial disputes aside to focus on bilateral relations given common challenges like climate change.

Despite the media war between the two countries over the current border clash, it is in the national interest of both countries to increase collaboration in trade, climate action, and other issues — especially as the world plunges into a recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It could be this realisation that prompted Modi’s downplaying of the Galwan Valley clash by suggesting that the “Chinese neither entered our territory nor has any post been taken over by them”. 🇳🇵

Rastraraj Bhandari is pursuing a Masters in Economics and China Studies at the Yenching Academy of Peking University in Beijing.

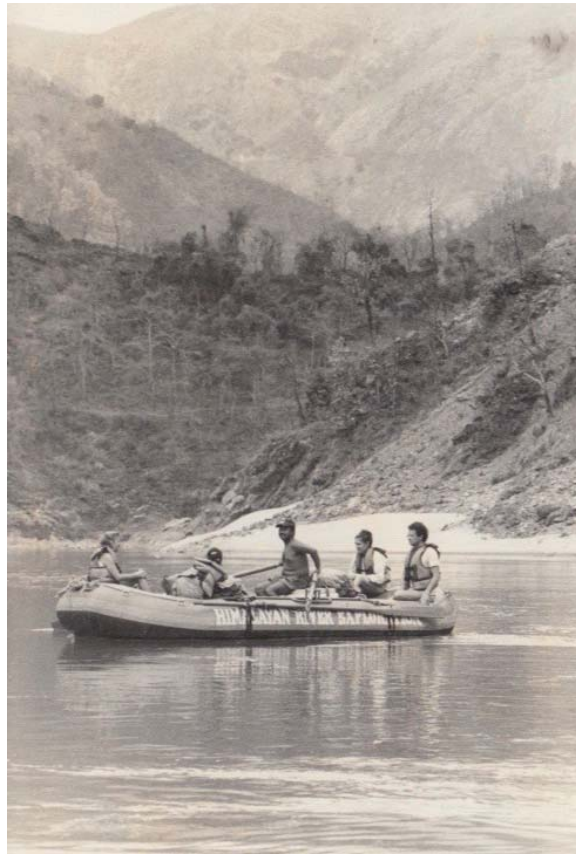
The wild and wonderful Bill Gavin, 1936-2020

From a life of Himalayan white water rafting, to motors, music and movies



Bill Gavin in New Zealand last year, telling a good story of the "old days" from his eventful life.

MICHAEL CLARK



A 1983 Himalayan River Exploration trip camping down the Trisuli River before the Mugling-Bharatpur road was completed.

Bill Gavin in England showing his penchant for flashy cars.

“Oh dear, look what happened to my pants!” We pulled onto the beach and Bill clambered out of the big rubber raft having just emerged from one of the more impressive



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegyal

rapids on Nepal’s Trisuli River. The chilly curtain of cold water and adrenaline rush of surviving Upset without an upset had us all whooping with excitement. Bill’s stylish beige linen trousers had shrunk with the dousing and were clinging to his legs like an unseemly pair of tights.

Bill Gavin was with us on one of the early three-day river runs, to be followed by a few days wildlife watching at Tiger Tops Chitwan. It was 1982 and the road from Mugling to Bharatpur was nearing completion. Villagers along the banks still found our overnight camps a curiosity, and no belching truck fumes polluted the evening beers around a driftwood blaze or disturbed the silent nights under a canopy of stars.

The wild and wonderfully wicked Bill Gavin was a legend brimming with passion, vigour and colour who had exploded into my life as a friend of my louche and

much-loved Uncle Terry. Together they haunted the glamorous Grand Prix circuit of the swinging 1960s. Bill writing about motor racing (he was European editor of *Car & Driver* magazine and biographer of world champion Jim Clark) and Terry managing a Formula 1 driver who was killed in a crash, as happened all too often in those unsafety-conscious days.

When I hooked up with them in London, Terry was in the music business (signing Dire Straits was his claim to fame) and Bill was big into movies after a spell managing pop groups. The third of this unlikely trio of best mates was Stanley Myers, composer of the haunting *Deer Hunter* theme.

The story goes that Bill talked his way into movie production starting as the GTO boss’ chauffeur and ending up as the boss, but stories like that abound about Bill Gavin. He toured with chart-toppers The Sweet, New Seekers and Springfield Revival, and did gigs with Gary Glitter. He was almost recruited by the CIA, narrated the 1966 film *Grand Prix*, managed a Ferrari team, released the first Antipodean movie *Picnic at Hanging Rock in UK*, took *Apocalypse Now* to Australia, and helped finance New Zealand’s *What Became of the Broken Hearted?* and *Whale Rider*, that marvellous Maori classic.

At the time we were camping riverside on the Trisuli in his

terminally shrunken pants, Bill was riding high as the hard-driving distribution and sales wizard on the board of Goldcrest Films, on his way back to London from the *Killing Fields*’ shoot in Thailand. Goldcrest’s other best pictures included *Chariots of Fire*, *Local Hero* and *Gandhi*, and Bill had his own UK company, Gavin Films.

Bill loved to shock and push the envelope, long before the #metoo generation. He ricocheted between marriages and girlfriends, had three wonderful children, Tom, Panda and the eldest who was saddled with the name Gavin. Yes, Gavin Gavin, whose gorgeous mother Sarah Jane was Bill’s first wife and a Mary Quant model. At their parties you might meet Graham Hill and other racing drivers, Victor Hugo’s granddaughter, Polish film directors with unpronounceable names, or Barry Humphries aka Dame Edna slumped in their sitting room telling cannibal air-crash jokes: “We’re on the last leg of the flight.”

At one of these eclectic gatherings, I had a Scottish neighbour in tow: “See you later, I’ll look after myself,” he called cheerfully as I disappeared into the smoky crowd. Finding himself next to a skinny, bespectacled chap on the sofa, attempts at polite conversation were not going well. “I’m a guitarist,” was all he could extract. “What sort of guitar – rock or pop or jazz – or classical guitar,

like John Williams?” Andrew was struggling. “I am John Williams,” came the laconic reply.

Bill was famous for behaving badly and being in love with him was a recipe for disaster. He had a mercurial temper and a reputation for bullying employees. I once saw him explode into unjustifiable road rage as he deftly wove his flash car through the London traffic — speed was a religion. And our brief walk-out in the early 1980s ended dramatically and finally when he ran off with my brother’s girlfriend, on the Concorde to New York no less, thus delivering a memorable family double whammy. We consoled ourselves that they thoroughly deserved each other, and it didn’t last long.

Bill’s plunge from these dizzying heights of fame and fashion followed a few too many divorces and the vagaries of the British film business. His expensive mews house in Notting Hill, silver Porsche, trendy Italian restaurants, and champagne Pimms parties under the yellow laburnum all evaporated in the 1990s when he beat a hasty retreat to his native New Zealand.

Adapting with aplomb to life in a downtown Auckland high-rise council flat, Bill painted it rich dark colours, and filled it with books, pictures and an oversize leather casting couch shipped across the world from his West End office. At economical shepherd’s pie dinner

parties renowned for bevvies of loyal media and driving friends, over a glass or three of wine Bill would regale us with tales of the “old days”, his braying laugh filling the room. Despite his straitened circumstances he contrived to drive a smart Mercedes donated by a kind admirer who shared his petrol-head passion.

In a rare moment of quiet reflection, Bill confided that his ideal retirement was a cottage in the Bay of Islands, in New Zealand’s far north. It was the first time I had heard of the place, but it never happened. Aged 83, Bill Gavin died last month at home in Auckland, rescued by friends and family from grim isolation in a locked-down COVID-19 hospital, he peacefully departed a life packed with motors, music and movies.

Some young devotees recently videoed Bill for a school project, deftly capturing his enthusiastic essence, even at the end: “Looking back on all my careers, motor racing was certainly the most exciting ... I was attracted by the intellectual intensity of the sport ... I knew everybody ...”

In our last call arranged by Bill’s kind niece his laboured breathing penetrated the long-distance WhatsApp line, but he squeezed her hand and I could feel his smile as I told him that, despite everything, I still loved him and always would. Bill had that sort of effect on people. 🇳🇿



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A COVID-19 game changer for Nepal

Using existing GeneXpert machines in the country would quickly increase test capacity for coronavirus

Abhilasha Karkey
and Buddha Basnyat

At a time when Nepal's COVID-19 detection capacity cannot keep pace with the number of people who need to be tested, a quick solution is already available and only needs to be activated.

These are GeneXpert machines that have revolutionised diagnosis of TB in Nepal since 2011, and can easily be used to test for COVID-19. There are 100 of them in hospitals across Nepal, and with new cartridges can be used to augment testing for the coronavirus without buying expensive new machines.

There are nearly 65,000 people in quarantine centres across Nepal, mainly returnees from India. More Nepalis are returning from abroad on flights, and there is also a need to test people who are contact traced. There are only 20 government labs across Nepal doing RT-PCR, and they have a backlog of 27,000 samples.

The GeneXpert system was developed by a California-based company called Cepheid which specialises in molecular diagnostics. It developed this innovative platform to simplify a highly complex, multi-stage process for the detection and analysis of nucleic acids in biological and environmental samples.

A single platform can perform many diagnoses, from cancer tests to routine critical infectious diseases and virology. Currently, 28 tests can be performed, but the menu is expected to run to 33 tests by 2022. A broader range of in-house testing ensures faster turnaround time and improved patient management.

Surprisingly, many people in Nepal, including doctors, have not heard about the GeneXpert system which is actually a real time polymerase chain reaction (RT-PCR) nucleic acid amplification technology.

It was because of GeneXpert machines that Nepal was found to have a much higher prevalence of tuberculosis (more than 400 per 100,000) than previously thought (200 per 100,000). The same machines can now be used to authentically diagnose COVID-19.

GeneXpert machines use different cartridges for different pathogens. Once an investment has been made on the machine, it can be used for various tests by purchasing the appropriate cartridges.

Furthermore, because all reagents are present in the cartridge, the extra time needed for reagent preparation in the traditional PCR machine is not required. This means that GeneXpert results are available within 30 minutes, which is important in a quick and reliable COVID-19 test before an emergency surgery, for example.



If enough COVID-19 cartridges were made available to use on the 100 GeneXpert machines all over Nepal, they could test least 8,000 extra samples a day. Interestingly, the location of these machines are all district hospitals in COVID-19 hotspots in Nepal.

Cepheid has set the price for a GeneXpert cartridge at \$19.80 for low- and middle-income countries. The regular price in the US is \$35. Médecins Sans Frontières and Cambridge Consultants have assessed that the subsidised price can come down another \$5, and still generate profit for the company.

But even at the current rate of \$19.80 (Rs2,500) per test, GeneXpert is still more than half the Rs5,500 that RT PCR tests cost at present in Nepal.

An even more important factor is that GeneXpert tests require minimum training as opposed to the traditional PCR tests which need well-trained technicians. And since GeneXpert cartridges

are a self-contained system, often not requiring elaborate personal protection equipment, they are safer for disposal than traditional PCR plates.

The FDA (the US Food and Drug Administration) has approved this test, the World Health Organization (WHO) has recommended its use for the diagnosis of COVID-19 to the European Union.

The only challenge is to ensure an adequate supply of cartridges, and it is the Nepal government's job to make a strong case to international donor agencies to help obtain them. Indonesia (pictured above) and Kenya have done so, and are using the cartridges. The GeneXpert COVID-19 test is not meant to be a replacement for the traditional RT PCR tests, but to top up existing testing.

It is common sense to make use of the GeneXpert machines we already have all over Nepal. If this country was a private company, it would make good business sense as well.

Come autumn, Nepal will have many more respiratory illnesses like seasonal flu to contend with, besides COVID-19. How will we know which is which? It is likely that even COVID-19 infections will

go up as there will be more coughing and sneezing as winter approaches. We have about two months to be ready to make a prompt diagnosis of viral respiratory illnesses, and distinguish between the garden variety flu from COVID-19. Fast, reliable and inexpensive diagnostic tests are going to be the key in the months and years to come.

The COVID-19 virus does not seem to be going away quietly, as many had hoped and incorrectly predicted. Because South Asians are predisposed to diabetes, we have an even greater predilection for COVID-19. Clearly, we need to be prepared on all fronts including prompt and proper diagnosis for now and the imminent, potential winter onslaught. 🇳🇵

Abhilasha Karkey and Buddha Basnyat
work at Oxford University Clinical Research Unit of Patan Academy of Health Science. Buddha Basnyat also writes the regular medical column, Dhanvantri in Nepali Times.

prabhu BANK BIZ BRIEFS

Himalaya Airlines & Huawei

Himalaya Airlines and Huawei Cloud, have joined hands to create a Smart Silk Road to enhance passenger travel experience



and promote 'smart aviation'. Leveraging its advantages in ICT, Huawei will provide Himalaya Airlines with competitive products and services to provide passengers better ticket options.

NMB Bank

NMB Bank Limited has signed a repeat loan mandate with World Bank Group member IFC, becoming the only Bank in Nepal to receive consecutive financing over



two years. The \$25 million loan will be invested in strengthening Nepal's priority sector industries, Green Projects, and to encourage new entrepreneurs in Small and Medium enterprises.

Cellpay tieup

CellPay has collaborated with Kheti Foods for a new CellPay Kheti offer, under which customers can use the Kheti app to get a 50% discount on the purchase of



products. The company has also partnered with Global IME Bank to promote digital payment services and fund transfer services through web and mobile to pay utilities, remittance, and insurance payments and more directly from their Global IME bank accounts. Meanwhile, IMS Group has an agreement with SmartDoko, one of Nepal's largest e-commerce companies, to acquire a substantial stake.

Samsung M11

Samsung has launched its Galaxy M 11 smartphone in Nepal. The M11 has an Infinity-O display, a triple rear camera, and a 5000 mAh battery and is available in metallic blue violet and black at Rs.18,999.



Samsung has also announced a reduction in price on four of its leading smartphone models: the Samsung Galaxy Note 10lite, the Samsung A71 and A51, and the Galaxy Tab A 10.1

Realme C3



Realme has launched its new C3. smartphone that is equipped with better

performance, battery, display, and camera, and is available in 2 colours: the Blazing Red and Frozen Blue. Realme C3 will be available in offline outlets across Nepal at Rs16,990.

Ford

Ford vehicles in Nepal has launched a special offer on its latest BS6 compliant 2020 Ford vehicles, the major components of which include a



Go Further

10-year finance facility, a down-payment of 30% along with Deferred Payment, and a COVID-19 family insurance with warranty and free servicing.

Hyundai

Hyundai motors on 29 June announced winners of the Hyundai Festive Delight



2076 Offer, under which customers had an opportunity to win grand prizes and cash discounts on the purchase of any Hyundai vehicle.



EVENTS



Birds of Kathmandu

The British Council is organising a family-friendly webinar on the birds found in Kathmandu Valley to encourage more people to take up birdwatching to build interest in and contribute to bird conservation. The webinar will be led by Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN) and will include expert advice on getting started with birdwatching in and around Kathmandu Valley. Register at bit.ly/31rcWWY
Deadline: 3 July, 6pm



Writing Wednesday

Keep an eye out for KathaSatha to put up a prompt for #WritingWednesday, designed for 5 minutes of specific but low-stakes writing. KathaSatha will put up the prompt on Facebook. Share stories in the comments on KathaSatha's Facebook page. To share anonymously, send the story in Katha Satha's DMs or at kathasatha@gmail.com.



Virtual benefit concert

Sahayeta Nepal and Sano Paila are joining hands with Nepal-born and globally recognised Grammy nominated artist Manose for a benefit concert to raise funds to support organisations on the ground that provide basic essentials such as food, water and PPEs to returning migrants at the Nepal-India border. Books ticket at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/110079737458>
3 July, 6:15am onwards

Mindfulness hike

Join the therapeutic hike organised by Bouddha Retreats to deal with stress, anxiety and other issues pertaining to mental and emotional well-being. Get additional information and registration link at the Bouddha Retreats Facebook page. Safety and distancing guidelines apply
4 July, Rs1000, 9860812005

Danfe arts

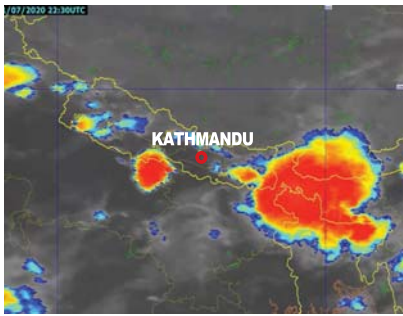
Danfe aarts' initiative #danfeartssupports seeks to promote local arts and artists, and will share the work of four artists every week that are available for purchase, followed by an Instagram takeover by the artists over the weekends. Keep an eye out on Instagram for more details.



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The monsoon is picking up second wind after a spell of three days without precipitation in Kathmandu Valley. The reason was a change in wind direction from the southwest -- which was also what brought the locusts into Nepal from north India. As this satellite radar image of Thursday morning from the Department of Meteorology (left) shows, a new monsoon pulse is massing up to the east and south of Nepal. These systems will move into central Nepal and bring monsoon showers, mainly in the evenings and night over the weekend.

FRIDAY




26°
21°

SATURDAY

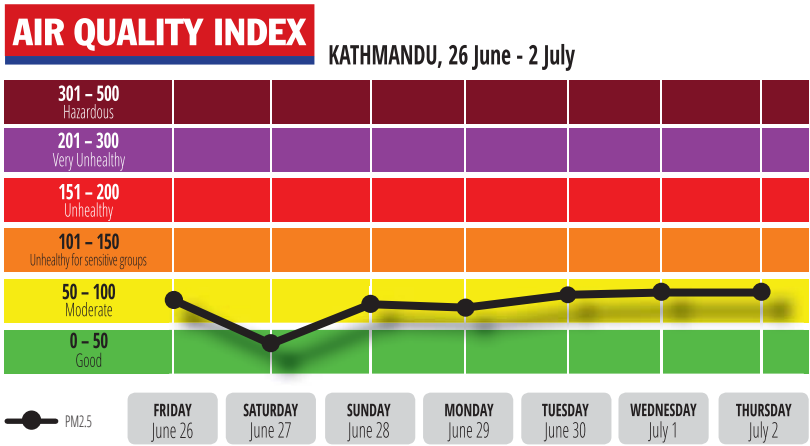


25°
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SUNDAY

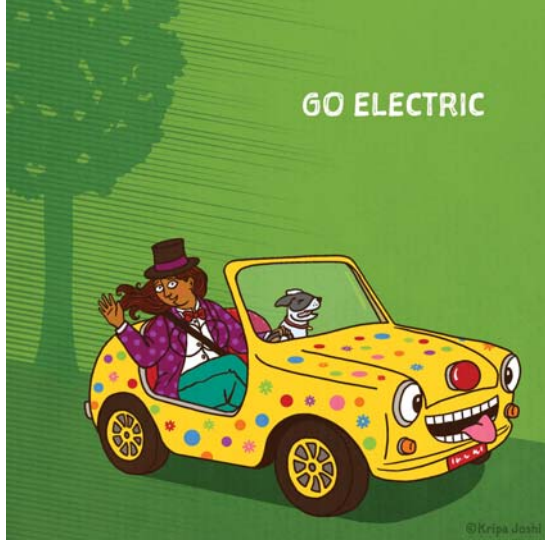


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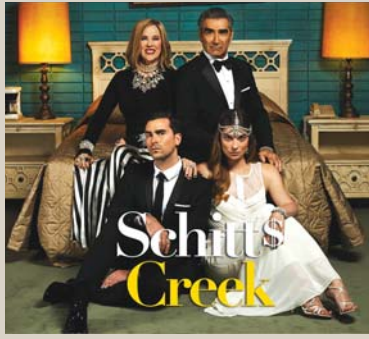


The concentration of particulate matter smaller than 2.5 microns in Kathmandu's city centre was below 100 throughout the week, and the daily average Air Quality Index (AQI) stayed firmly in the yellow 'Moderate' zone except last Saturday when the air cleared up considerably and moved to the 'Good' green band despite gradual opening of the lockdown. With a new monsoon pulse approaching, the existing pollutants have a greater chance of being washed down.
<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI **KRIPA JOSHI**



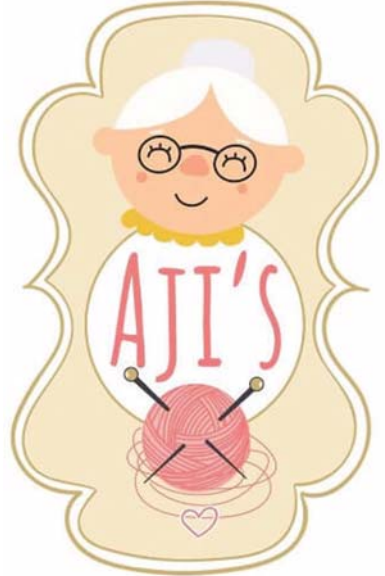
Electric vehicles (EV) can have several environmental benefits specially for city commutes. They have lower maintenance cost and are more efficient at converting stored energy into driving a vehicle. Conventional engine waste energy as heat and emit tailpipe pollutants. If a country generates electricity from renewable sources, then the reduction in CO₂ emissions is even greater. While producing batteries for electric cars rely on mining for rare-earth elements, this environmental footprint is offset within a year or two of the car's lifecycle. #FridayForFuture



OUR PICK

Formerly wealthy Rose family is suddenly forced to relocate to *Schitt's Creek*, a small town they once purchased as a joke in this Canadian sitcom as they adjust to life without money and with each other over six seasons. Eugene Levy, Catherine O'Hara, Dan Levy and Dan Levy star in this gem of a show that has been nominated for the Emmy, SAG and GLAAD Media Awards.

ONLINE ARCHIVES



Aji's Podcast

Listen to inspiring and extraordinary life stories from Nepal's elderly community. Find Aji's Podcasts on YouTube, Apple Podcasts, or Stitcher.



Photo Museum Nepal

Take a look at archived photographs from throughout Nepal's history and learn the stories behind the photographs.



Botanical garden tour

Google Earth's Stop and Smell the Flowers is journey through eleven of the most breathtaking botanical gardens and arboretums around the world from countries like Russia, Sweden, and Canada, to the Netherlands.

Seeker

Seeker tells award-winning stories about the natural forces and groundbreaking innovations that impact lives, the planet, and the universe. Look for their videos on technology and medical advancement. Find Seeker on YouTube and Instagram TV.

Project Gutenberg

Catch up on classics on public domain. Search for literary classics at Project Gutenberg. Download ebook formats suited to individual devices.

QUARANTINE DINING



Gelato

Nothing beats the heat and humidity of summer like ice cream. Browse the menu at Foodmandu to get ice cream from the classic cookies and cream to apple cinnamon and every flavour in between.
Delivery: 12pm-6pm



De' Pizza Square

Order De' Pizza Square's delicious wood fire pizza.. Call to get the meal delivered and to inquire about the delicious Italian menu.
Mangal Bazar, 9803839269



Casa Mexicana

Experience the best of Mexican food. Try the Carnitas burrito, Tinga quesadilla and the traditional Tres Leches cake. Head to Foodmandu to browse for more.
Delivery: 12pm-6:45pm, Bakhundole, 9803624067



Grill Durbar

At Grill Durbar, there isn't anything that can't be grilled. Try the signature grilled chicken and the Durbar fries. Check out Foodmandu for more.
Delivery: 12pm-6:15pm, 981378858, 9841677377, 9803082797

Jatra Cafe

Jatra Cafe & Bar has an extensive menu of authentic Newa cuisine. But the Samaya Baji Newari khaaja set is one of the best out there and as authentic as it can get. Place orders through the Bhojdeals app.
(01) 4256622

The Vesper

Take a gastronomic tour of Italy during the lockdown. The next best thing to being there to sample classic Italian fare, washed down with fine wines. Order online.
(01) 5009240

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

फोन: नं. १०९८ मा खबर गरौं ।



नेपाल सरकार

सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय

सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग

Close encounters with tigers in Nepal

Villagers who survived wildlife attacks live to tell their terrifying tales

Mukesh Pokhrel
in Bardia

6 January, 2004. It was a foggy and cold winter morning in the western Tarai. As secretary of the Gauri Community Forest User Group, Bhadai Tharu was escorting a group of 15 villagers into the woods. They are allowed into the protected forest once a year to collect thatch and fodder.

Tharu, now 51, was also responsible for the management of the forests that formed a vital biodiversity corridor for wildlife of the Bardiya National Park.

What started out as a perfectly normal day soon turned into a nightmare. The sun had burnt off the fog by noon, and Tharu and his colleagues heard a growl from the undergrowth of the sal hardwood forest.

Before he knew what was happening, in a flash of orange the tigress leaped out of the bushes and went straight for Tharu's face, swiping him with her mighty paw. The blow knocked him down, and he fell unconscious on the ground.

His petrified team fled the scene, and the tigress dug her claws into Tharu's face, gouging out his left eye. She was pinning him down with her forelegs when Tharu came to. Instinctively, he punched the big cat on her face, and the tiger slipped away, disappearing back into the jungle.

He could feel warm blood pouring down his face, and stumbled back to the river crying out for help. Eventually, some nearby grass cutters came to his rescue, and he was rushed to hospital in Nepalganj where he spent a month recovering.

"I would have died if I had run"

Krishna Shah was guiding a Dutch tourist on a day-long walking safari through the Bardiya National Park in February 2016. They were tracking footprints and fresh dung which meant there were rhinos nearby. Sure enough, they found the rhinos were grazing and the tourist was busy clicking away, when there was a terrific roar.

The tiger appeared out of nowhere between the two, who both ran for their lives. "After running for 20m I looked back to find no one behind me. I had lost my guest, and was worried the tiger had killed the Dutchman," he recalls.

With another guide, he circled back to the spot to look for his guest, who called down from a tree he had climbed to escape. What Shah did not know was that the tiger was waiting in ambush, and pounced on him from behind trying to get his jaws around his neck.

"Had I chosen to run, the tiger would have definitely caught and killed me, I had no option but to fight back. It was a kill or be killed situation," Shah, 38, remembers. "The tiger reared up on its hind legs to attack, and I poked it with a stick. It scratched me with its claws and pushed me to the ground."

The other guide then hit the tiger from behind with a tree branch, so the tiger decided he'd had enough and ran off. The group was rescued by a National Park elephant, and Shah was lucky to escape with only scratches.

Knocked unconscious

Sundarlal Chaudhari's life has revolved around his cattle that he grazes every day in the grasslands at the edge of the Bardiya National Park. That day in February 2004



ALL PHOTOS: MUKESH POKHREL



had been like every other, and as the winter sun started to set Chaudhari was walking home with 40 cattle from the Kailasi Community Forest, on the fringes of the Park.

He did a swift mental count and realised one of his calf was missing. With three other herders, he went into the forest to find it, and spotted a tiger had half-eaten the calf. As Chaudhari got closer, the tiger attacked. His back and hands were mauled by the tiger's fearful fangs. His companions shouted and yelled, and drove the tiger away. Chaudhari had already lost consciousness, and was rushed to hospital where he was lucky to make a full recovery.

"The water buffaloes saved me"

Last year, 67-year-old Mayaram Khanal from Geruwa Rural Municipality in Bardiya was grazing his buffaloes near the National Park. Suddenly, a tiger attacked Khanal hurling him about 10m away. It then leaped down to finish him off when, incredibly, Khanal's two water buffaloes came to his rescue. They swung their formidable horns at the tiger,

chasing it away and saving Khanal's life. The buffaloes are now treated like heroes in the village.

Post-script

In all of these close encounters with tigers, the lives of the people who survived went through a transformation.

When Bhadai Tharu lost his eye, he was angry at the tiger making him disabled, and was determined to take revenge. "It was fate, but I thought if I saw that tiger again, I would kill it," Tharu remembers thinking. "I was also angry at the people for not coming to my rescue earlier. But as my wounds healed, my anger diminished."

Bhadai Tharu is now a tiger conservationist, seeing the forest habitat as a place where animals and people have to co-exist. "Tigers are vanishing as their habitats shrink, and when the tiger attacked me, it was just doing so to protect itself from danger," he says.

Today, Tharu trains locals in conservation practices, and provides educational material to local schools. He has also persuaded many poachers and

smugglers to abandon their profession. They threatened to shoot him, but he seems to have lost all fear. He has even created inspection patrols to curb smuggling of tiger parts.

It was all because of his near-death experience. "If I had not been attacked by that tiger, I would not be saving tigers. I came to understand them better and it became my duty to save them."

Having worked in indentured servitude as a kamaiya for much of his life, he also gained a newfound respect and self-confidence after the incident. "I lost an eye, but this does not worry me. I found a new path in life and gained respect," says Tharu, who is determined to continue his conservation activities.

He has received many national awards and the internationally-renowned Abraham Conservation Award for his efforts. In 2010, he was even paid a visit by Leonardo DiCaprio whose foundation supports tigers conservation in Nepal. After their chat, DiCaprio took off his shades and gifted it to Tharu, who still treasures it. Villagers have persuaded him to

MIRACULOUS SURVIVORS:

Bhadai Tharu (*left*) holds a pair of shades gifted to him by Leonardo DiCaprio for his contribution to tiger conservation in Bardiya National Park. Tharu had been mauled by a tigress in 2004, and is blind in one eye. He thought of taking revenge on tigers, but turned his anger into a new commitment to save its jungle habitat and to control wildlife poaching.

Safari guide Krishna Shah (*below, far left*) showing the scars of a tiger attack 15 years ago that taught him to be careful during jungle walks with tourists.

Sundar Lal Chaudhari (*below, centre*) was also attacked by a tiger while grazing his cattle near the National Park, but luckily survived.

The most astounding survival story is of Mayaram Khanal who was saved from a tiger attack by two of the buffaloes he was grazing. This is Khanal recovering in hospital (*below*) after his near-death experience last year.

stay on as secretary of the Gauri Forest User Group.

Krishna Shah is still an active safari guide. He can now tell what kind of tigers to avoid during jungle walks: old tigers, females with cubs, and tigers who cannot find prey because of injuries.

Sundarlal Chaudhari still grazes cattle in the same forest where he was attacked despite the danger. "I can't keep them tied up, and there is nowhere else to go," he says. Last week, a buffalo calf belonging to his daughter-in-law was killed by a tiger.

Mayaram Khanal is recuperating at home, and the Bardiya National Park paid his hospital bills. But the debt he owes the buffaloes that saved his life is too great to pay back.

Bhadai Tharu, showing off the shades gifted to him by Leonardo DiCaprio for his work saving tigers after being nearly killed by one in 2004.

Bhadai tharu, showing his left eye which was taken out during a tiger attack 14 years ago in Bardiya National Park.



Gokyo from Gokyo Ri in 1985 with yak herder huts, and Ngozumba Glacier.



Gokyo today with Mt Cholatse in the background.

Saving Gokyo from itself

How tourism and climate change are transforming Nepal’s most fragile and scenic places

Ang Rita Sherpa

I was born in the ancient mountain ecosystem of Solukhumbu in Nepal. For me, not to be among mountains is like being without parents who look after their children and prepare them for their future. The mountain wilderness is not just made up of the icy peaks that tower above us, but also a natural habitat in which highland people like myself live, inheriting the rich natural and cultural resources. We have borrowed it from our ancestors to live in and admire in this life, before we pass it on to future generations.

From a purely material point of view, mountains are rich in natural resources that include water, timber, minerals and rare biodiversity. They call them ‘eco-system services’. However, equally important is the healthy, natural lifestyle and rich cultural heritage of mountain peoples.

Mountains also offer a place of rest from the troubles of the world, and are a desirable destination for tourists, migrants, pilgrims, or just urban refugees who seek solitude, adventure, recreation, scenic and spiritual beauty.

For centuries, the relative remoteness and isolation of the mountains protected them from human impact, and even if people used the natural resources they did so more sustainably than in many lowland areas.

But with better connectivity, the combined advances in extractive resource technology and increased leisure time, both the negative and the positive impacts of human activity in mountainous regions have increased significantly.

As the mountains become more accessible, and as we learn to exploit their ecosystems for material development and benefits, it brings about a degradation of the natural environment. These delicate systems are being negatively impacted by an increase in local populations, as well as the large-scale annual migration of tourists and adventurers.

Once secluded areas are now opening to exploitation by industry and tourism. We should consider the lessons and history of Nepal’s own national development and that of our tourism industry.

The COVID-19 pandemic gives the mountains of Nepal a breathing space and it buys us time to chart a new course so that our development model does not come at the cost of irreversible natural degradation.

As previously remote and pristine areas are opened to human exploitation and activity, there is an increasingly urgent need to act to protect and nurture nature in the same manner that it has nurtured our people.

Growing up as a Sherpa boy in the then remote mountains of Solukhumbu, I have experienced the changes in these mountainous regions first-hand. Like the rest of the mountainous regions of Nepal, Gokyo Valley of Khumbu Pasanglhamu Rural Municipality #4, is being transformed by development.

Thirty years ago, Gokyo valley along the Ngozumba Glacier, Nepal’s longest, was uninhabited except for the summer grazing of livestock. Gokyo also has religious significance, and has remained a sacred pilgrimage site for centuries.

The holy Gokyo Lakes at 4,750m-5,000m are popular pilgrimage destinations for both Hindus and Buddhists. During the Janai Purnima Festival in mid-August, thousands of Hindu and Buddhist pilgrims flock to the holy site to bathe and renew themselves.

The spectacular blue lake was internationally designated as a Ramsar wetland preservation site in 2007. Gokyo is not only a destination for grazing yaks and spiritual pilgrimage, it is the home of many unique and rare species. The alpine biomes of the lakes support endangered and unique flora and fauna.

Endemic medicinal and aromatic plants

species such as the flowering *Kobresia fissiglumis* or the medicinal *kutki* plant are a resource for local populations. While the ecosystem is delicate, it is able to support large mammals such as the Himalayan Tahr and the Snow Leopard.

The lakes are also an important stopover for birds on their trans-Himalayan migrations twice a year. Flocks of migratory ducks briefly join local birds such as the wood snipe on their way to and from the Tibetan Plateau and beyond.

However, during the last two decades, Gokyo Valley has become the second most popular remote destination among trekkers seeking adventure, challenges and solitude. The main attractions are the mountains all around from Cho Oyu that rises up at the head of the valley, to Mt Everest and Makalu to the east, and Thamserku and Kangtega to the south.

Many trekkers started making Gokyo their destination to avoid the crowds on the Everest Trail, and also because the view from Gokyo Ri is more spectacular. The Sagarmatha National Park received more than 60,000 tourists in 2019, and a third of them visited Gokyo.

When asked, trekkers cite several reasons for why they come to Gokyo. Many believe that the panorama from Kala Patar above Everest Base Camp is actually much more constricted by high mountains, and there are no human settlements in the upper Khumbu Glacier to give the human touch.

The other attractions of Gokyo were:

- Better perspective on Mt Everest by means of a shorter and more easily accomplished route.
- More professional excursions to the lake and surrounding viewpoints.
- Sherpa ancestral culture, traditional mountain villages and friendly homestays

- An overwhelming, inspiring and incredible landscape all along the trail as well as from Gokyo Ri.
- Challenging walks and healthy activity.
- Delicious, healthy local dishes in Sherpa family lodgings.
- The camaraderie and storytelling around the fire or stove.
- Stunning sunsets.

While the number of visitors to Gokyo Valley is small compared to those visiting the Everest Base Camp their impact is nevertheless significant, and growing. Tourism in the Gokyo Valley has, without a doubt, provided a range of positive opportunities to the local people in the form of employment and income.

Gokyo Lake now faces the impact of livestock and pilgrims. These can be locally resolved and mitigated, but the increased volume of tourism and the higher material demands and consumption of tourists and adventurers is a threat to Gokyo’s fragile ecosystem.

The following quote from a local yak herder interviewed in 2013 explains the dilemma: “My family has been coming to Gokyo for over four to five decades. In my father’s time, one *goth* had as many as 100 yaks and naks, but now no one has more than 1 or 2. People cannot keep up as many as they used to, since there is not enough grass. The area has become a tourists hub, the *goth* have all been turned into teashops and lodges in last two to three decades.”

Despite obvious problems caused by human activity, there continues to be a steady increase of herders, pilgrims and tourists in these areas. The delicate environment is struggling to cope, and the once productive pastures of the Gokyo Valley are degrading into scrubland.

The area is further compromised by deforestation and overgrazing. At these high altitudes, the loss of the delicate flora results in landslides and erosion, which adds to



Mt Cho Oyu reflected on Gokyo Lake at sunrise.

ALL PHOTOS: ANG RITA SHERPA



The high altitude Chakor pheasant.



Rare medicinal plants in the Gokyo region.



Ruddy Shelduck migratory waterfowl in Gokyo.

the rapid deterioration of the fragile mountain ecology.

Human waste is the other issue in Gokyo, as the number of tourists rises, so does the support staff needed to take care of them. The tourists all expect western style bathrooms with flush toilets, showers and other facilities. The traditional pit latrines that used to provide manure for the fields have now been replaced with septic tanks, where the overflow feeds directly into the sacred lakes.

The traditional pit compost toilet is environmentally friendly and is a reasonable local solution. We have abandoned sustainable ancestral methods to modern sanitation facilities under the assumption that they are more modern and guests prefer them.



The primary reason for this transformation is the family-scale economic opportunity provided by tourism. Locals derive economic security from trekkers, attracting yak herders and potato farmers to abandon their traditional lifestyle and expand into delicate wilderness areas to build more lodges.

This increases the demand for energy. Cooking is mostly done with LPG cylinders that are brought up on yaks and mules from Phaplu. Firewood comes from dwarf junipers growing along the Ngozumba moraine and shrubs on the slopes, which are used up for cooking and heating.

As long as firewood demand was local and not very high, nature had a chance to grow back. But at higher altitudes, plant growth is much slower and the greater demand for firewood means the alpine vegetation does not have time to regenerate – resulting in the destruction of many years’ worth of growth in order to provide tourists with a hot shower or tea.

Unlike most of the high altitude wetlands and sacred lakes of Nepal, which have no nearby villages and are largely uninhabited, local seasonal herders and tourists trekking use Gokyo’s lake intensively.

- In summary, these are the environmental problems that the region is facing:**
- Encroachment of the lakefront by lodges, walls and other construction.
 - Increased number of lodges surrounding lake.
 - Removal of cushion plants and rhododendron shrubs, thereby increasing siltation of the lake bed.
 - Plastic packaging and non-compostable garbage is being carried into the sacred lake by wind and rain.
 - Flush toilets using large amounts of water mixed with human waste eventually drain directly into the sacred lakes.
 - Lack of management and few environmentally mitigating rules or instruction for pilgrims.
 - Erosion due to loss of vegetation on the moraine and slopes, increasing danger of landslides.
 - Geologically fragile mountain structure.
 - Continued retreat of the glaciers resulting in the formation of new lakes.

Indeed, aside from the short-term pressure from increased tourist traffic, the entire Khumbu region is feeling the direct impact of climate change. The Gokyo lakes are expanding. Supraglacial lakes and melt pools on the debris-covered Ngozumba Glacier are expanding, as the glacier itself retreats and shrinks.

The ice is melting because the mountains are thawing at a faster rate than the global average. At present rates of warming, one-

third of the remaining ice in the Himalaya is expected to melt by 2050. But aside from global temperature rise, the ice-fields higher up are also melting because of soot deposition from pollution and forest fires. This has accelerated the glacial retreat, and the trend can be seen all around Gokyo in the dirty ice.



All of these varied human activities are rapidly degrading, depleting and altering the natural conditions of the regions’ resources. The extraction of these mountain resources has increased, yet there is little reinvestment into either the local ecology or local communities.

Stabilising and improving the ecosystem and security to the local population are both necessary and have to happen side by side.

Those resources should be managed in a way that sustains the unique mountain environment and cultures, thereby preserving its many valuable potentials. In order to protect precious resources, this threat of destruction by our own people and international visitors can and should be avoided.

Careful and considerate planning and implementation of local or national development projects are needed. Long-term management of Sagarmatha National Park must involve the local people from the very beginning of any new program.

It is now obvious that nature conservation is not possible without local participation. This has been demonstrated clearly in many failed conservation projects and programs in Nepal and worldwide.

We must use the time we have been

given by the coronavirus lockdown to think of a new way of managing tourism in Nepal in general, Solukhumbu in particular – and especially in the fragile Gokyo area.

- Action points to protect this unique natural landscape for posterity:**
- It is not wise, sustainable or recommended to construct lodges in one of the world’s finest unspoiled natural areas, without regard to their architectural suitability.
 - Local lodges along the main destinations are undergoing expansion and refurbishment without proper planning and minimal codes of conduct. There is an urgent need for a building code and the introduction of a permit system for new establishments.
 - Local participation in the planning and management of protected areas is desirable, a community-based approach to tourism is essential to boosting the local economy and ensures a more equitable distribution of the benefits. Local participation also increases the community’s investment and cooperation with program or project goals.
 - There should be a regular monitoring system for tourist lodges and facilities and this system must be standardised as per Himalayan National Parks Rules and Regulations. All lodge operators should be given sufficient training in lodge management and related issues.
 - Establishment of a Lodge Management Committee could provide more democratic and effective control of this local economic activity. Likewise, committees can play a key role in promoting fuel-efficient technologies, proper waste management, fixing and improving menus based upon geographical pricing systems, standardising lodges, promoting improved sanitation and hygiene conditions, as well as the building and maintaining of community trails.



Ang Rita Sherpa is Chair of The Partners Nepal.

Removing ‘fair’ from Fair & Lovely is not enough

Colourism is everywhere in South Asia, not just in the beauty industry

Suveda Pradhan Tuladhar

On 25 June, the multinational Unilever announced that its Fair & Lovely, will be rebranding itself by taking out ‘fair’ from its popular and successful cosmetic line

The renaming was a response to the backlash fueled by the #BlackLivesMatter movement that started in the United States and has spread all over the world.

More than 18,000 people signed two petitions that demanded the termination of the product and its advertising.

Unilever is not stopping production of the cream or changing the ingredients, but will just stop using the word ‘fair’ in the name and remove its two-face cameo portraying a fairness transformation.

Unilever has a long history for depicting lighter skin tones as the ideal and superior form of beauty, and introduced Fair & Lovely to the Indian market in 1975. For decades it has been the number one fairness product of choice for millions of women across South Asia, and until 2017 it held up to 70% share of the Indian skin-whitening industry.

The reason for the brand’s success is a successful promotion campaign that reinforces the negative stereotype of a Eurocentric ideal of beauty that has its roots in internalised racism, and entrenched colourism in South Asia.

Social scientists have said that this creates lasting self-loathing and irreversible emotional damage



to people with darker complexion, perpetuating injustice and discrimination. Colourism therefore reinforces prejudice against individuals with a dark skin tone not just in people of different racial groups, but also among the same ethnicity and caste.

Colourism starts from a young age as children hear relatives ask about a newborn’s complexion just days after the delivery. As the child grows up, the fairness of their skin is repeatedly referenced with great value.

In school, the teasing and bullying of dark complexioned classmates is something many South Asians have to go through. I myself remember being nicknamed “*kaalikawaa*” (black crow) even in KG in school in Kathmandu.

As children grow up, they are exposed to advertising, TV commercials, and billboards bombarding them with subtle messages promoting colourism. These do not have to be products that are named Fair & Lovely, or blatantly say fairer is better. Products that do not have ‘fair’ in their name, like Nivea, are also spreading the wrong message of fairer skin tones being preferable and more attractive as well.

When they get to be of marriageable age, complexion becomes the main criteria in the selection of a spouse – mainly of women. India’s Shaadi.com matrimonial website removed a search filter based on the skin tone of users.

The existence of such filters in

online match-making sites alone proves how deeply ingrained colourism is in South Asia.

One of Nepal’s prominent cosmetologists Shrijana Pradhan said in a recent interview that skin lightening procedures increase during wedding seasons, citing fairness face treatment as one of the most popular services provided by her Sipi Beauty Club.

Colourism is also not-so-subtly promoted by the film industry in South Asia, where blockbusters often has dark-skinned actors cast as villains, while the heroes and heroines are fairer.

Bollywood celebrity stars like Sharuk Khan and Priyanka Chopra have actually gotten fairer over time, and other actors have actively endorsed and promoted skin whitening and lighting products. Khan has modelled for Fair & Handsome for men in India as well.

Nepal’s entertainment industry also seems obsessed with skin colour, and has been ridiculing darker skinned characters for decades. The massive hit ‘Jaalma’ has a line “*Gham le malai sataula, kaali malai banaula*” in which a woman asks her suitor to unfurl an umbrella to protect herself from being dark.

The lyrics of another classic all-time hit ‘Poi Paryo Kale’ goes “*eh*

didi poi paryo kale... hunnadue bhahinii jataina phale” – the female character regrets how she ended up with a dark husband, who then is consoled by her sister asking her to let it be. There are many other movie sequences and music videos that refer to a darker complexion as conventionally unattractive

To be sure, there are also few songs about dark skin being projected in a positive light. But they are far fewer and rarely uplift darker skinned people.

Additionally, the glamour industry also tends to favour lighter skinned models, actors and actresses as well as pageant participants over their darker skinned counterparts. In 2017 when Nikita Chandak was crowned Miss Nepal, she was met with criticism and backlash by the general public for being dark skinned. She was an anomaly within the historically fairer skinned winners of Nepali beauty pageants.

The stereotype also means fairer-skinned women are more susceptible to unwanted attention, harassment, sexual abuse and sex trafficking. Nilufer Medora in her book Global Perspectives on Prostitution and Sex Trafficking writes that Nepali women fair skin and timid personalities are preferred by many clients in India’s brothels.

Unilever’s move to rebrand Fair & Lovely is a welcome move, but a lot more needs to be done to uproot the unfair preference for fair skin in South Asian Society. 🇳🇵

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