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 manoeuvres on Thursday, 2 July:

0900 Supporters of Prime Minister K P Oli drive to NCP party executive chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal’s residence in Khetwadi. Among them were ex-Speaker Subhas Nembang, Defence Minister Ishwor Pokhri, Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali, Province 5 Chief Minister Shankar Pokhrel, adviser Bhusn 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 Khetwadi 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 Jaamini restaurant, Agana.

1100 Prime Minister K P Oli drives from Baluwatar to meet President Bidya Devi Bhandari at her official residence to Mahajamai 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 in 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 agendas 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 Baluwatar, 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, Shankar Koirala 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 Baluwatar to rejig the Standing Committee which was then purged until 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.
Political is supposed to be a mechanism through which the most competent candidate selected to a democratic state for a time-bound period 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 offtaking and reflationing 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 Nepalese Communist Party got so impatient for power that it waged an armed struggle. Slaughtering with the army ten years later at great human cost, the Maoists signed a ceasefire, contested elections, won and lost, and then merged with the centre-left UML in 2017 under the new Constitution. In the past two-and-a-half years the UML has been in power, there has been constant jostling between the two main leaders in the party: Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli and co-Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal. As Oli, who unites his supporters, their state to form a complete government within ten years. A deadlock in the two-party system could prove a serious blow to Nepal’s democratic progress.

It is no surprise that the Maoist would-be successors are all TLPs, trained, failed from the past. Nepal is now isolated within the NFC Secretariat, the Standing Committee and the Parliamentary Party, and has run out of cards to play. It’s desperate, he has no one else to turn to. The UML party’s bargaining position with the NC allies and other parties is now diminished, and it is the UML that is in the state of the nation’s interest.

What does not inspire much hope is that Oli’s would-be successors are all TLPs, trained, failed, from the past. We cannot completely discount Oli yet. He remains to be the last resort of those who oppose the old UML party, which means he is willing to split the unified CNC to get it on the table. There is a lot of pressure on him from the UML Congress and UML, in recent Nepali history. When his position was shaky in April 2021 Oli himself nearly passed a party split ordinance in April to accommodate the Madhavites faction. It is an anti-viable and anti-Flower party, and it is against Nepal’s national doctrine of Jawaharlal Nehru: equality, human rights, ourpictuage, our giant neighbours. What does not inspire much hope is that Oli’s would-be successors are all TLPs, trained, failed, from the past. Which is why the youth are on the streets they have to give up on the political scene. The best option for the alliging Oli now is to bow out. He can carry out the peculiar Communist nhiệm of public self-criticism, give up one of his posts, keep the party intact, and let the government handle the economic, social, emergencies caused by the global pandemic.

10 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

10 years ago this week, Baburam Bhattarai and others, who were on trial in a controversial rape and murder case of a college student, were sentenced to 11 years each in prison. The decision by the court was a landmark in Nepal’s judiciary. The 1990s saw a wave of innovations in the legal system, as the country moved away from a system based on customary law. The decision also highlighted the importance of gender equality and the protection of women’s rights.

In the past, many Nepali political parties have been involved in the same cycle of power politics. The conflict has led to a loss of trust among the people, as well as a lack of progress towards a stable and prosperous society.

But by their very existence, they have an impact on the shape of political discourse in Nepal. The element of surprise: the main role played by the role of the media in the political process is not limited to elections, but it also shapes public opinion and on the outcomes. By providing a platform for discussion and debate, the media can help to hold politicians accountable and promote transparency and accountability.

The political landscape in Nepal is diverse, with many different parties representing a wide range of interests and ideologies. This diversity is a strength, as it allows for a variety of perspectives to be heard and for the government to be held accountable to the people. However, it can also lead to fragmentation and make it difficult to find common ground on important issues.

In conclusion, the political landscape in Nepal is complex and multifaceted, with many different players and interests at play. The role of the media is important in shaping this landscape and ensuring that the voices of the people are heard. To ensure that the media is truly independent and able to serve as a checks and balances in the political process, it is important to continue to support and protect the free press in Nepal.
Gorkhas on the frontline between India and China

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

Pratishtha 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, due to the involvement of soldiers from Nepal in the Indian-Pakistan conflict. The violence, in which 20 Indian 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 with multiple flashpoints.

Nepal’s own border dispute with India over Limpusyang, roughly coincided with the Galwan Valley clash, and was followed by Indian Army Chief Gen Manoj Mukund Naravane’s comment that Nepal was “setting a dangerous precedent of something else” — meaning China.

But Nepal has even more at stake in India’s disputes with China and Pakistan — there are over 30,000 Gorkhas deployed in the Indian Army's folds, 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 frictions to break out at least three times after 1962. The confrontation this time is the most severe since then.

There is no official breakdown of the numbers of Gorkhas in the Indian Army who died in the Sino-Indian War of 1962 and the India-Pakistan War of 1971 in the Himalayas, but an estimated 2,000 soldiers on the Indian side were killed. Nepal’s Foreign Minister Pradeep Gyawali says Nepal has no formal demographic data for how many of its soldiers have been killed by China in the same week when Modi engaged in a bitter land dispute with Pakistan.

One of the demands of Nepal’s Manifesto when they were underground and fighting the monarchy was to stop Indian and Indian recruitment of Nepal’s soldiers to fight in the mountains. “Various factions of the left movement of Nepal have time and again called for the abolishing of the Gorkha recruitment. They cite the fact that Nepal’s citizens are hired to fight strangers’ wars,” said Nepal Times. Meanwhile, in many in India, Nepal is now being firmly in the China camp, whereas the Nepalese government has not done enough to allay the fears, and the latter is said to have been poorly informed.

Meanwhile, many in India are worried in the China camp, whereas the Nepalese government has not done enough to allay the fears, and the latter is said to have been poorly informed. According to the Nepalese government, Nepal must adhere firmly to one of its most important foreign policy issues — equal and friendly ties with both China and India and a peaceful settlement of disputes.

Rastaranj Bhardwaj

The current climate change talks are a chance for Nepal to solidify its role as an intermediate power, fixing sustainable development and making progress towards the UN’s goal of zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

The Chinese have been a major driver of climate change negotiations, playing a central role in pushing for the 2015 Paris Agreement. In particular, China has been a leader in promoting the concept of “carbon neutrality,” which seeks to achieve net-zero emissions of greenhouse gases.

China's policies and actions in this area have been widely praised, and the country has been seen as a key player in the global effort to tackle climate change. However, despite these efforts, China remains the world's largest emitter of greenhouse gases, and many argue that more needs to be done to achieve the goal of net-zero emissions.

For Nepal, the current climate change talks offer an opportunity to push for greater action in the country, particularly in areas such as renewable energy, energy efficiency, and carbon capture and storage.

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

Rastaranj Bhardwaj
The wild and wonderful Bill Gavin, 1936-2020

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

“O h 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 rapids on Nepal’s Trisuli River. The chilly curtain of cold water and adrenaline rush of surviving Uper without an upset had us all whooping with excitement. Bill’s stylish beige linen trousers had shrunk with the dressing 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 Rastipur was nearing completion. Villagers along the banks still found our overnight camps a curiosity, and no belching truck horns polluted the evening bees around a driftwood blaze or disturbed the silent nights under a canopy of stars.

The wild and wonderfully wrecked Bill Gavin was a legend toiling 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 evening 1960s. Bill writing about motor racing was European editor of Car & Driver magazines and biographer of world champion Jim Clark and Terry managing Formula 1 driver who was killed in a crash, as happened all too often in those unsafely-concussive days.

When I booked up with them in London, Terry wrote in the music business (signing Elvis Strats 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 at 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 Antipodesian movie Phantom at Hanging Rock in 1984, took Apocalypse Now to Australia, and helped finance New Zealand’s What Became of the Broken Hearted? and Who’s Rider, that marvellous Maori classic.

At the time we were camping river-side on the Trisuli in his permanently 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 Charlotte of Egypt, Local Hero and Gandhi, and Bill had his own UK company, Gavin Films. Bill loved to shock and push the envelope, long before the Atonement generation. He recollected between marriage and girlfriends, had three wonderful children. Tim, 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 slumber in their sitting room telling contacting air-cush jokes. “We’re on the last leg of the flight.”

At one of those 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, lanky,, spectacled 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 ironic 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 dizzily drove 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 Emsambly to New York no less, thus delivering a memorable family double whammy. We concealed ourselves that they thoroughly deserved each other, and it didn’t last long.

Bill’s plunge from these dashing 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 Porches, trendy Italian restaurants, and champagne Fimma parties under the yellow lambrum all evaporated in the 1990s when he had a hearty retreat to his native New Zealand.

Adapting with aplomb to life in a downtown Auckland highrise council flat, Bill patrolled his rich dark colours, and filled it with books, pictures and an overzeal leather couch shipped across the world from his West End office. At a luxurious sheep’s wool dinner parties renowned for reviews of lively media and driving friends, over a glass or three of wine Bill would regale us with tales of the “old days”. His beary laughing filling the rooms. Despite his strident 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 devotes recently videoed Bill for a school project, defiantly 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.
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

GeneXpert machines use different diagnostic technologies to detect pathogens. Once an investment has been made on these machines, there is no point in buying 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.

The device 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 hospitals 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 (over 600 per 100,000) than previously thought. If sufficient GeneXpert machines are now being used to authenticity diagnose COVID-19.

If enough COVID-19 cartridges were made available to use on the 100 GeneXpert machines all over Nepal, they could test just 8,000 extra samples a day. Interestingly, the location of these machines are all district hospitals in COVID-19 hotspot 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. Most other Prestwick and Cambridge Consultants have assessed that the subsidised price can come down another 5%, and still generate profit for the company.

But at the current rate of $19.40 (Rs2,500 per test), GeneXpert is still more than half the Rs4,500 that RT-PCR tests cost at present in Nepal.

As 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 the personal protective equipment, they are safer to perform than traditional PCR plates.

The position (the US Food and Drug Administration) has approved this test, the World Health Organization (WHO) has also expressed its interest in 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 drug 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’s 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.

The great 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 at 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 predisposition 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

NAPA 2020 Offer, until customers had an opportunity to sell goods and prices are cheap discounts on the purchase of any mobile phones.
**Virtual benefit concert**
Sahayata Nepal and Sara Palla are joining hands with Nepal-born and globally recognized Grammy nominated artist Manu for a benefit concert to raise funds to support organisations on the ground that provide basic essentials such as food, water and PPPCs to returning migrants at the Nepal-India border. Book ticket at https://www.eventbrite.in/e/107097337045.

**Writing Wednesday**
Keep an eye out for KahaSahifa to put up a prompt for Writing Wednesday, designed for 5 minutes of speed but low-stakes writing. KahaSahifa will put up the prompt on Facebook. Share stories in the comments on KahaSahifa’s Facebook page. To share anonymously, send the story to KahaSahifa’s DM at info@kahasahifa@gmail.com.

**Mindfulness hike**
Join the thursplas hike organised by Bouda Beats to deal with stress, anxiety and other issues pertaining to mental and emotional well-being. Get additional information and registration link at Boudha Beats’ Facebook page. Safety and distancing guidelines apply.

**Photo Museum Nepal**
Take a look at archived photographs from throughout Nepal. History and urban stories behind the photographs.

**Seeker**
Seeker is a digital storytelling platform that highlights the best images and ideas that impact lives, the planet, and the universe. We feature videos on technology and medical advancement. Find Seeker on YouTube and Instagram TV.

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

**Birds of Kathmandu**
The British Council is organizing a first-of-its-kind webinar on the birds found in Kathmandu Valley to encourage more people to take up birdwatching as a hobby. The webinar is open to birdwatchers and beginners.

**Dance arts**
Dance arts’ Inclusive handmade products seeks to promote local arts and crafts and will share the work of a day a week. If interested, follow them on Instagram and engage with the artwork of the weekends. Keep an eye out on Instagram for more details.

**Botanical garden tour**
Geachte Earth’s Sapse and Sapse the Flowers is a journey through the vineyards of the most breathtaking botanical gardens and alpine farms around the world from countries like Russia, Sweden, and Canada, to the Netherlands.

**ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTTO**
**KIRPA KOSHI**
**GO ELECTRIC**

**Grill Durbar**
At Grill Durbar, there isn’t anything that can go wrong. Try the signature grilled chicken and the Durbar fries. Check out the Durbar fries for more.

**De’ Pizza Square**
Order De’ Pizza Squares delicious wood fire pizza... Call to get the meal delivered and to inquire about the delicious box menu.

**Jatra Cafe**
Jatra Cafe & Bar has an extensive menu of authentic Newar cuisine. But the Sunway Bijal Newari Risotto is one of the best out there and as authentic as it can get. Place orders through the Bhikashai app.

**The Vesper**
Take a gastronomic tour of Italy during the lockdown. The best thing to bring along is simple Italian fare, washed down with fine wines. Order online.

**Casa Mexicana**
Experience the best of Mexican food. Try the Combo burritos, Tingo quesadillas and the traditional Tacos with chicken, beef and cheese, served in a basket. To know more, Dial in 3:45 pm, Bal Bhawan, 01629064707.
Close encounters with tigers in Nepal

Villagers who survived wildlife attacks live to tell their terrifying tales

Mukesh Pokhrel
in Bardia

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

Bhabai Tharu, 51, was also responsible for the management of the forests that formed a vital biodiversity corridor for wildlife of the Bardia 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 tall hardwood forest.

Before he knew what was happening, 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 petalled team fired the rounds, and the tigress dug her claws into Tharu’s face, grabbing out his left eye. She was running him down with her ferocity when Tharu came to, instinctively, he punched the big cat out of 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. Horrifically, some nearby grass cutters came to his rescue, and he was rushed to hospital in Nepalgunj where he spent a month recovering.

“I would have died if I had run”

Kirit Malla, another Indian tourist on a day long walking safari through the Bardia National Park in February 2016. They were tracking footprints and fresh dung which meant there must have been rhinos nearby. Sure enough, they found the rhinos were grazing and the tigress was watching away, when there was a terrific roar.

The tigress appeared out of nowhere between the two, who both ran for their lives. “After running for a bit, I looked back and found no one behind me. I had lost my guest, and was worried the tiger had killed the Dutchman,” he recalls.

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 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 swing, and it was a kill or be killed situation,” Shah, 38, remembers. “I found a tree that was round on its axis, and away from the elephant. I pulled my legs to attack, and I kicked it with a stick. It scratched me with its claws and ran away to the ground.”

The other guide then hit the tiger from behind with a tree branch, but the king had bad enough and ran off. The group was then followed 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 Bardiya National Park. That day in February 2004 had been like every other, and as the winter sun started to set Gauntwari was walking home with 40 cattle from the Kulsari Community Forest, on the fringes of the Park.

He did a swift mental count and realized one of his calf was missing. With three other herdsmen, 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 manhandled 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 Gaurawa Rural Municipality in Bardia was grazing his buffaloes near the National Park. Suddenly, a tiger attacked Khanal beating him about 10m away. It then leaped down to finish him off, whenluckily, 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.

Postscript

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

When Bhada Tharu lost his eye, he was angry at the tiger making him disable, 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.”

Bhabai Tharu is now a tiger conservationist, saving the forest habitat as a place where animals and people have to coexist. “Tigers are vanishing as their habitats shrink, and when the tiger attacked me, I was just doing so to protect myself from danger,” he says.

Today, Tharu trains locals in conservation practices, and provides educational material to local schools. He has also persuaded many pockers and smugglers to abandon their profession. They threatened to shoot him, but he seems to have lost all fear. He has even courted 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 seeing tigers. I came to understand them better and it became my duty to save them.”

Having worked in indentured servitude as a kamayia 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 tiger 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 stay on as secretary of the Gaunt Forest User Group.

Kristna 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 infections.

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.

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

Bhabai Tharu, showing his left eye which was taken out during a tiger attack 14 years ago in Bardiya National Park.
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 subdivide 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 ‘ecosystem 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 resource 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 benefit, 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 mountainous 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 Pharsangkhu Rural Municipality 46, is being transformed by development.

Thirty years ago, Gokyo valley along the Aagamdu Glacier, Nepal’s longest, was unblemished 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 Jana Punima, festival in mid-August, thousands of Hindu and Buddhist pilgrims flock to the holy site to bath in and renew their vows.

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 pilgrimages, it is the home of many unique and rare species. The alpine blooms of the lakes support endangered and unique flora and fauna.

Endemic medicinal and aromatic plants species such as the flowering Kobresia (self-sustaining or the medicinal, knot 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. Flights 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 in 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 came 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 perspectives 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 homesteads.
- 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 got fed as many as 100 yaks and paxas, 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 tourist hub, the gho (traditional robe) has 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 borders, 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 three high altitudes, the loss of the delicate flora results in landslides and erosion, which adds to
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 compost toilet used to provide sanitation 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 suitable.

The primary reason for this transformation is the family-scale economic opportunity provided by tourism. Locals derive economic security from trekkers, attracting yak breeders 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 regrow. 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 borders and tourists trekking use Gokyo's lake intensively.

In summary, these are the environmental problems that the region is facing:
- Encroachment of the lakeshore by lodges, walls and other construction.
- Increased number of lodges surrounding lake.
- Removal of cushion plants and rhododendron shrubs, thereby increasing silting of the lakes 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.
- Flooding 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 meltponds 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 Himalayas is expected to melt by 2050. But aside from global temperature rise, the ice fields higher up are also melting because of sea 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 region's resources. The extraction of these mountain resources has increased, yet there is little reinvestment into either the local ecology or local communities.

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

These 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 lockdowns to think of a new way of managing tourism in Nepal in general, Sagarmatha 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 rehabilitation 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 fostering 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 touristic lodges and facilities and this system must be standardized 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, standardizing lodges, promoting improved sanitation and hygiene conditions, as well as the building and maintaining of community trails.

Ang Rita Sherpa is Chair of The Sherpas Nepal.
Removing ‘fair’ from Fair & Lovely is not enough

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

Suveena 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 18,600 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 belief that lighter skin tone is a positive stereotype of a Eurocentric ideal of beauty that has its roots in internalized racism, and entrenched colourism in South Asia.

Social scientists have said that this creates lasting self-hatred and irreconcilable emotional damage to people with darker complexion, perpetuating injustice and discrimination. Colourism therefore reinforces prejudices 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 values.

In school, the teasing and bullying of dark complexioned classmates is something many South Asians have to go through. I myself remember being nicknamed “kaalikawan” (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 “faster is better. Products that do not have “fair” in their name, like Nivea, are also spreading the wrong message of fairness being preferable and more attractive as well.

When they get to be of marriageable age, complexion becomes the main criterion 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 prove how deeply ingrained colourism is in South Asia.

One of Nepal’s prominent cosmeticologists Shrijana Pradhan said in a recent interview that skin-lightening procedures increased during wedding seasons, citing fairness face treatment as one of the most popular services provided by top salons.

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

Bollywood celebrity stars like Shanuk 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 modeled 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 ‘Hum Saath Saath Hain’ has a line “Cham le maati asthale, daadi mai sunde aakno” in which a woman asks her sister to unfurl an umbrella to protect herself from being dark.

The lyrics of another classic all-time hit ‘Piyo Piyo Kaale’ goes “eh didi poi piyo kaale... bhumabah bhattachariya phi”, – the female character regrets how she ended up with a dark husband, who then is counseled 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 protected in a positive light. But they are far fewer and nearly up till 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 Nepal beauty pageants.

The stereotype also means fairer-skinned women are more susceptible to unwanted attention, harassment, sexual abuse and sex trafficking. Nilufur Medora in her book Global Perspectives on Prostitution and Sex Trafficking writes that Nepal; 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.