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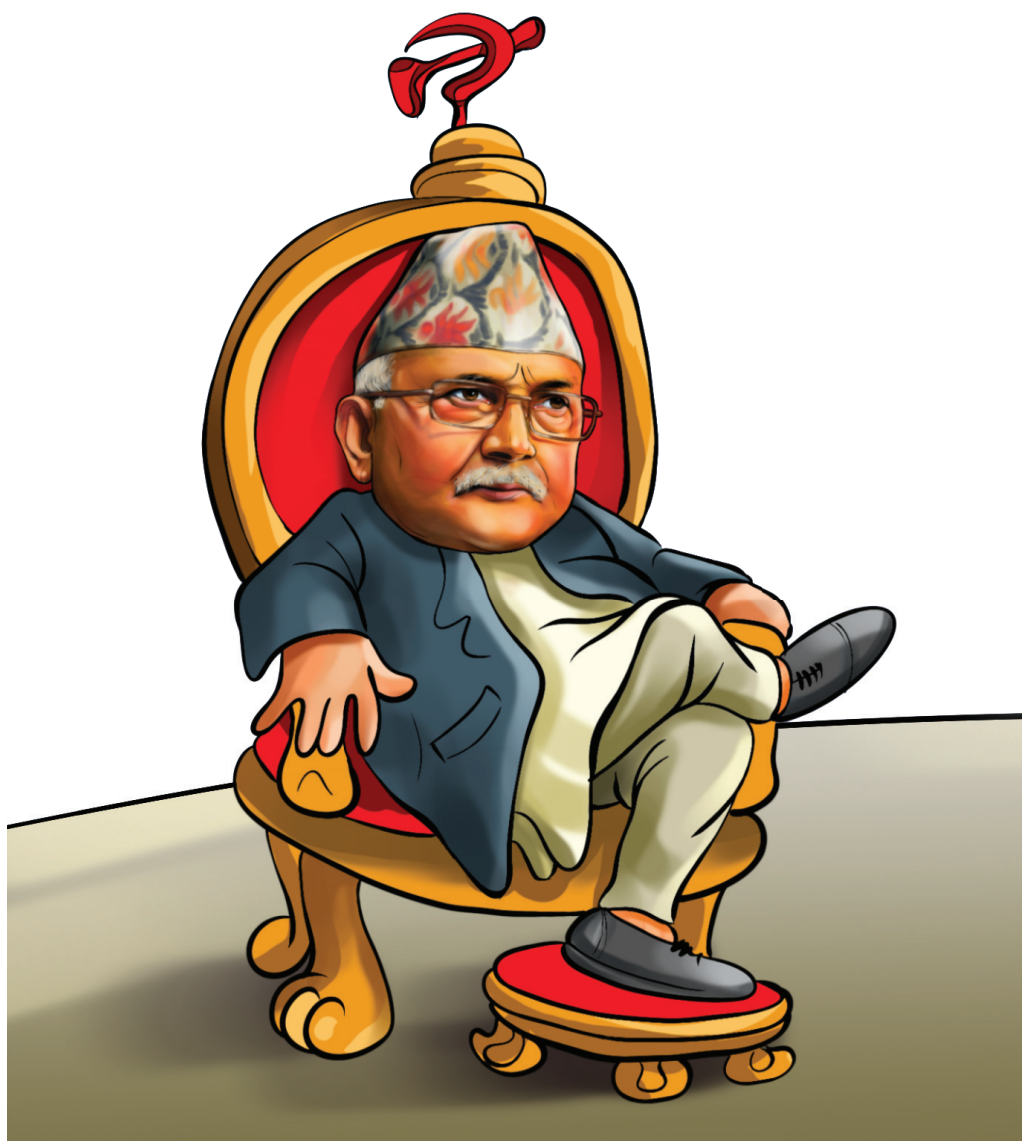
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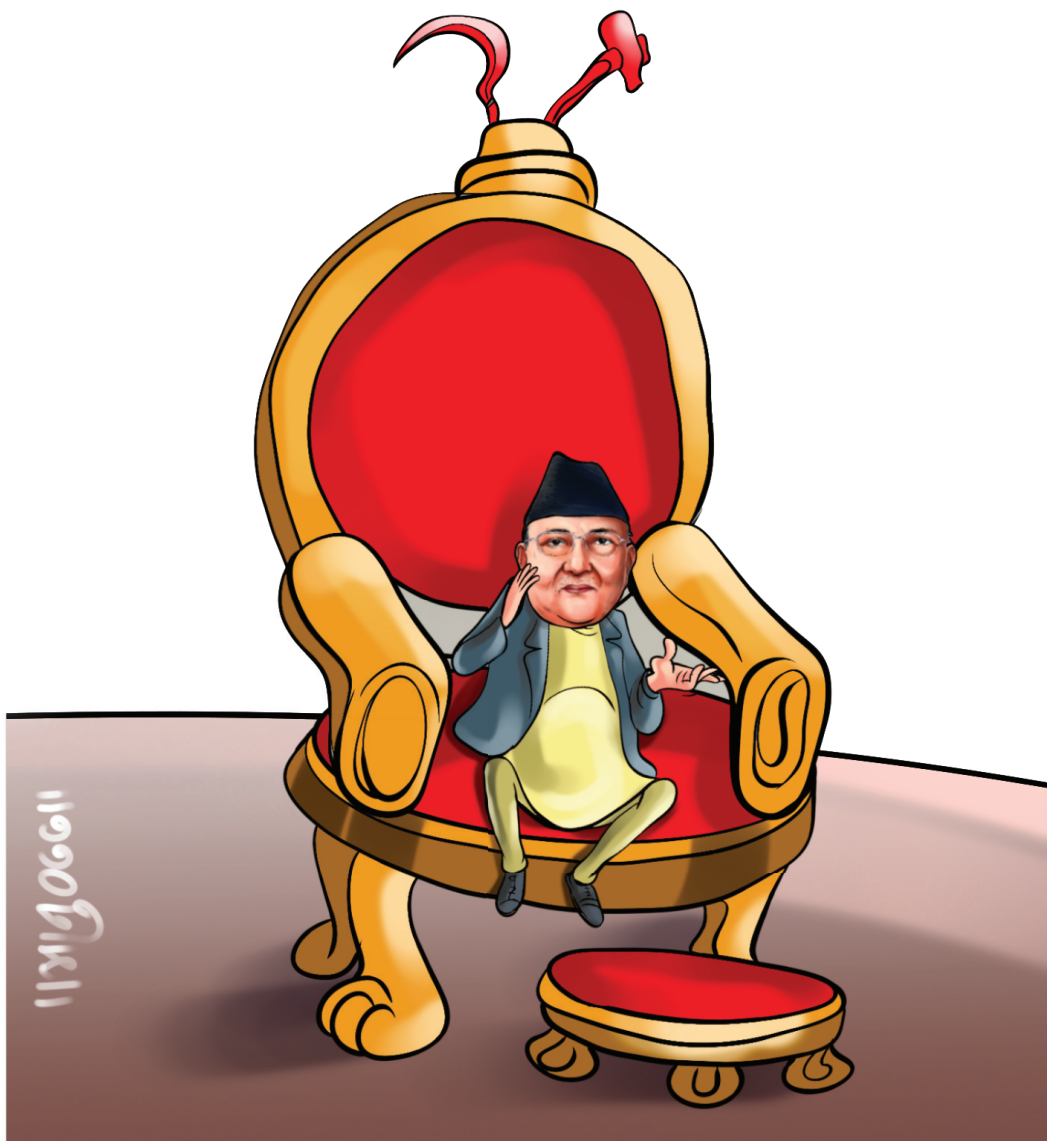
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BHANU BHATTARAI

Oli at midpoint of prime ministership

You have to give it to K P Oli, he seems to have wriggled out of the biggest crisis in his current tenure as prime minister. No, not the pandemic, but a near mutiny in his party.

Just as rivals within his Nepal Communist Party (NCP) were set to mount yet another offensive to oust him from office, he has defused the threat for now by agreeing to form a peacekeeping 6-member task force.

Halfway through his tenure, however, Oli and his party are not out of the woods yet. On Wednesday, for example, the Election Commission gave the re-registered UML its own election symbol. This was Oli's gambit to threaten to split the party if his rivals continue to challenge him – and it looks like he wants to keep that option open in case they backtrack.

After marathon meetings last week, Oli and party co-chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal reiterated their commitment to let a special party convention decide on the NCP leadership, and set up the taskforce to mediate till then.

Since then, members of the anti-Oli faction including Madhav Nepal have been ominously quiet.

It took Prime Minister Oli more than two-months to neutralise his rivals, but he is now confronted with the Covid-19 health and economic emergency. Cases are surging, and large parts of the country have gone back into lockdown.

Oli has been so engrossed in trying to save himself that he has not had time to save the country. There is widespread public outrage that his government mis-handled the coronavirus crisis and profited from the procurement process.

What a fall from grace it has been for a party that swept the 2017 elections on the promise of 'stability and prosperity'. Nepalis have seen neither in the past two-and-half years. Far from making the country stable, Oli is himself on shaky ground.

With another two-and-half years to go for elections, NCP leaders seems to have decided that they have to improve performance. Even

party insiders admit that if elections were held today, the NCP would not get a majority.

Even before the Covid-19 crisis, public disillusionment with his government had been mounting. Oli first tried to silence critics with restrictions on the media. When that did not work, he reverted to ultra-nationalism to distract attention from his failures, and to defuse the threat from within his party.

Even though the Covid-19 pandemic is a crisis, it gave the government a chance to finally prove itself. It did show some decisiveness in March with the lockdown, but failed to follow up by managing test kits, equipment, setting up adequate health facilities, and assisting those most affected by the lockdown. Worse, ministers were hand-in-glove with cronies and middlemen to siphon off the budget.

As the pandemic spread like wildfire across India, the government made another blunder last month by announcing that the

lockdown had been lifted – knowingly fully well that there would be unregulated movement across the open border. It should have lifted restrictions in phases, but the deed was done. The current spike in cases, and the need for another lockdown is a result of that oversight.

Who is running Nepal?

PAGE 3

Now that the prime minister has agreed on a kind of ceasefire with his party rivals, his government has another opportunity to turn its full attention and show that it has the capacity to deal with the socio-economic fallout of the pandemic.

To present a cleaner can-do face to the public, Oli is said to be working on a reshuffle. This is his last chance to nominate ministers based on integrity and capability rather than balancing internal party arithmetics.

The fate of the NCP in the 2022 election depends on it. 🇳🇵

Analysis by Rameswor Bohara

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Poet of the Nepali soul

When national poet laureate Madhav Prasad Ghimire died on Tuesday 18 August at the age of 101, it marked the end of an era in not just Nepali literature, but in Nepal's nationhood.

Ghimire embodied the Nepali soul in prolific poetry, many of which were rousing enough to be turned into national anthems. They resonated with love for country and its landscape, rich descriptions of mountains and valleys, rivers and forests. He wrote about the nurturing power of nature, observing and describing creation in all its spectacular glory and diversity.

Born in the village of Pustun near Bahun Danda of Lamjung district, Ghimire was



Madhav Prasad Ghimire 1919-2020
BHANU BHATTARAI

raised below Himalchuli, a mountain that crops up over and over again in his poetry. He grew up grazing goats in the high pastures, roamed forests picking wild berries, the hum of the Marsyangdi River constantly flowing through his mind – sadly whispering in winter, gurgling with happiness in the spring thaw, wild and angry in the monsoon.

He ran away from home at age 12, stealing some money from the family coffers, so he could get a better education in Kathmandu – then known as 'Nepal'. He got his college degree in Banaras, where many educated Nepalis sent their children in the Rana days when schooling was frowned upon by the state.

Many of Ghimire's poems have been rendered into song by Nepal's famous musicians like Narayan Gopal and Ambar Gurung, and his plays have been performed for decades in Nepal's theatres. Generations of Nepali children have grown up memorising his '*Gaunchha geeta Nepali...*'

Ghimire has said he was always inspired by Nepal's nature, and believed in its healing powers. This intimacy with the land and its inhabitants is a constant refrain in all his works. There were critics: he was deemed to be too close to the Panchayat rulers, helping

Queen Aishwarya with her poetry (some say he even ghost wrote some of them), supporting King Gyanendra's coup in 2005.

Lately, some labeled him with retroactive correctness, as a proponent of a unitary Nepal. He was unapologetic about this, but also celebrated in his poetry the ethno-linguistic rainbows that make Nepal Nepal. He tread lightly through life, never taking himself too seriously, and did not have time for cynics and people with strong, too rigid, convictions. He made a distinction in his poetry between flag-waving nationalism and patriotism. And along with his deep affinity for this land, he had a special place in his heart for his birthplace in Lamjung. It became a matter of great regret for him that he could not go back more often in later years.

His observational skills were phenomenal, using simple similes and rustic colloquialism to describe in the minutest detail the sound of night rain on blades of corn during the monsoon, Himalchuli glistening like a diamond in the moonlight, clouds massing up against the dazzling Himalayan sky.

Ghimire had vowed to finish his poetry epic

Ritimbhara before he died. He did indeed finish it, working on it till he became frail. The poet was cremated in the midst of a spreading pandemic on Wednesday morning. He leaves behind a rich legacy of words and music, many of which are

available in reprints of his books and in songs on YouTube channels.

One of his contemporaries and fellow centenarian is Satyamohan Joshi, who said upon learning of his friend's passing: "There were two of us in Nepal's literature scene who were older than 100. Now there is only me left. Maybe it is my turn next."

Ghimire wrote about death with acceptance, almost embracing it, using the power of verse to strip away the dread associated with a final departure. His poem *Gauri*, written in the traditional *chhanda* melody, is a melancholic masterpiece about losing his first wife. One of his most famous poems is about dreaming that he was dead, and which was later turned into a popular song by Narayan Gopal.

As death approached in recent years, he wrote openly about his own impending demise and about how he wanted to pass on like the night jasmine, silently falling from the tree in the morning to spread its scent among those left behind.

ONLINE PACKAGES



WATER WALK

This week, heritage conservationist Anil Chitrakar in his Walkabout series takes us around Patan's 1,300 years old water system, one of the greatest technological achievements of the Kathmandu Valley civilisation and explains the science and engineering behind it. Tune in to Nepali Times YouTube channel for full video.

LOCKDOWN AGAIN

This is a consequence of poor leadership, ignorance and corruption ('Kathmandu Valley back to lockdown', nepalitimes.com). Be conscious, use your common sense and stay well people.

Sunil Tamang

This is the safest thing to do even when it hurts.

Reiner Harbers

The government imposed lockdown once before, local authorities are doing it now. But what about working-class people who struggle everyday to survive and pay for their children's education?

Sandeep Jnawali

LOCKDOWN WOES

Sometimes I wonder if Nepal Times is the only newspaper taking up important social issues ('Half of Nepal's girls may drop out of school', Namrata Sharma, #1023). Another well researched/presented window into the real Nepal.

David Durkan

Worrying reports stressing need to have initiatives to encourage and support girls getting back to school - and for school to be safe supportive spaces.

Sara Parker

Sad truth but not for our girls!! A sponsorship brings certainty, hope, and support and allows parents to feel empowered and backed to be able to make the best decisions and keep their girls in school! All our girls will be back in the classroom as soon as schools reopen.

We All Rotate

In Achham, that will be the reality. There is no electricity and Internet connection is awful. We have the EDUFEM project to encourage girls to continue with highschool and avoid early marriage, but funds are short.

Rato Baltin Project

How can we help ('COVID-19 impact on food and school in Nepali children', #1023)? How much does it take to feed a child for a month?

Patricia Scheiber

POLITICS AND RELIGION

I agree with every word in this Editorial ('Opium for the masses', #1023). Still, though Oli may have political intentions, Modi's action and India's map have created an antithesis to Indian patronage and *dadagiri*. However, mixing religion with politics is not a good sign.

Sagun Sangraula

Politicians use religions to control the population, it's been going on for centuries.

Steve L Roberts

WALKABOUT WITH ANIL

Enjoyed another heritage walk with Anil about Kathmandu Valley's amazing ancient water supply system ('Walkabout with Anil: Hiti', Nepali Times YouTube channel).

Margit Eggemann

ANG TSHIRING SHERPA

Thanks for this well deserved tribute to Ang Tshiring, a self made man who had imagination, courage and conviction in his ventures ('The silent skies', Lisa Choegyal, #1023).

Devendra Basnet

An accomplished, wonderful human being never to be forgotten.

Carroll Dunham

He was a wonderful husband, father, patriot, visionary and a friend. His perseverance, tenacity, humility and wisdom was an inspiration and guiding light. Missing him greatly.

Philip Phang Kin Ming

TOURISTS IN NEPAL

They should be allowed to ('Stranded visitors should be allowed to stay on', by Sonia Awale #1023). They would be the best ambassadors for Nepal.

Rajiv Desraj Shrestha

Reality is that most expats refuse to pay the extortionate fees of \$3,000 plus for repatriation flights. Myself am desperate to return to UK. The weak health infrastructure and corruption here is terrifying.

Dominic McMahn

Let them stay and support Nepal's tourism industry. They are the only tourists Nepal has at the moment.

Linda Ris

ANNA STIRR

She sings so beautifully, that too the folk songs of Nepal despite being native English speaker ('An American-Nepali deut', Gopal Gartoula, #1023). Thank you for loving our music with such a great passion.

Pradip Shah

The music and rhythm of Nepal's mountains and plains flowed in Madhav Prasad Ghimire's veins

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

This week 20 years ago in its sixth print edition Nepali Times published a report on the government's historic decisions that changed the political course of the nation: the Kamaiyas were finally freed, the human rights commission was set up, and the citizenship bill was passed.

Also in this issue, Rukma Shumsher Rana, former vice-chairperson of Nepal Sports Council says the council is run like Panchayat these days, since the interview two decades ago, there has been significant change in the way the Council works and sports is given more emphasis today.

The Editorial is titled Yes, Prime Minister and analyses the furor when Prime Minsiter Koirala called Parliament "a den of smugglers". Excerpts:

Good Housekeeping: The Nepali Congress hadn't indulged in one of its periodic attacks of self-flagellation this month, the 18th session of Parliament might have gone down in the history books as the most productive application of democracy in Nepal so far.

You could say that wrangling and dissent are a part of democracy, but look at what was achieved:

1. The Kamaiyas were freed.
2. The Human Rights Commission was set up, because the MPs demanded it.



3. The budget was passed before the fiscal year for the first time.
4. The controversial Citizenship Bill was passed.

"Sports Council is run like in Panchayat days": If there was one person who stood out during the opening of the South Asia Federation Games last year, it was Rukma Shumsher Rana. As he welcomed the delegates in his capacity as chief organiser, his easy grace and polished manners impressed many. It was perhaps a reward for a job well done that Rana was appointed Nepal's ambassador to Sri Lanka after the Games. But he declined the honour.

Yes Prime Minister: The House had to be adjourned for a day in the furor that followed the Prime Minister's remark that the parliament was a den of smugglers, or words to that effect. Koirala seems to have been alluding to alleged crooks within his own party. The NC's opwn lawmaker Rajendra Kharel said: "All our leaders know who the shady people in our party are. But why do they keep nominating them election after election? Why do they have to be made ministers in every cabinet formation or reshuffle?" Good point.

From the archives of Nepali Times of the past 20 years, site search: www.nepalitimes.com.

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WHAT'S TRENDING



An American-Nepali duet

By Gopal Gartoula

While a Nepal-born rap sensation Curtis Waters is creating waves internationally, the American Anna Stirr sings the dohori like a native. Meet this accomplished performer and watch videos of her singing in this profile widely shared on social media.

Most reached and shared on Facebook



Half of Nepal's girls may drop out of school

By Namrata Sharma

New survey shows that 53% of female students may not go back to schools when they reopen because of lockdown induced financial hardships, undermining Nepal's gains in female school enrollment. Detailed report in nepalitimes.com.

Most popular on Twitter

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Most visited online page



Stranded visitors want to stay on in Nepal

By Sonia Awale

Tourists still stuck in Nepal don't want to risk Covid-19 infection travelling long distances to go back home. Others don't have a home to go back to or want to explore Nepal. Latest update: the government is allowing them to extend their visas up to 15 December.

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

In the 2nd episode of his Walkabout series, heritage conservationist Anil Chitrakar takes us around Patan's 1,300 years old water system and shows us how it serves residents to this day. Watch full video in Nepali Times YouTube channel.



Utpalasia @utpalasia

One of our favourite topics, the Patan spouts and the beauty of this sustainable water system! Thank you @NepaliTimes and Anil ji for another great tour! #Nepal #Kathmandu



JC Intrigo @JCintrigoZ

These water distribution systems are actually very interesting. Cool old water stuff.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

A study published on @TheLancet has revealed that #COVID19Pandemic has caused 50% fewer women in #Nepal than usual to give birth in hospitals, resulting in higher risks for premature births, stillborn deliveries and newborn deaths. @martydogan reports.



Shuzata Singh @stellar_shuzata

The achievements that were made in maternal and child health and nutrition have been pushed back due to the pandemic lockdown. Health system in Nepal needs to be strengthened!



Neeraz @neerazgotame

We from entire government authorities to grassroots have been focusing too much on Corona and have forgotten other diseases. As a result, more people are dying without getting basic medical treatment. The state is on the path to failure.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes

Despite the danger of infection a depleted police force is enforcing restrictions to control the virus. So far a total of 620 police across the country have been infected with Covid-19. @NepalPoliceHQ



#Nepal #COVID19

Hi-ma-yah @Night04812666
I'd like to thank the police officers, for working on the frontlines to prevent the COVID-19 from spreading.

Who is in charge in Nepal?

The Covid-19 control committee is acting like a government within a government

Alisha Sijapati

The confusion and chaos that followed the sudden cancellation of repatriation flights on 16 August was just the latest proof that the Covid-19 Crisis Management Committee (CCMC) and the government are working at cross-purposes, thus deepening the misery of Nepalis already burdened with the pandemic and its economic fallout.

The CCMC had already cleared the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) to issue a schedule of repatriation flights till 31 August. Embassies abroad had drawn up the passenger manifest based on their priority lists. But it abruptly cancelled the permission, saying quarantine hotels were not ready.

Tens of thousands of Nepali workers who had been waiting for over five months to fly home, and families trying for flights out of Kathmandu were affected.

A Nepal Airlines Airbus was en route to Dubai to pick up passengers, and had to return empty on Tuesday. The 266 returnees who had already got expensive PCR negative tests and had been issued boarding passes, had to return to their dorms in the UAE.

The CCMC is led by powerful Defence Minister Ishwar Pokhrel, who is a confidante of PM Oli. Sources in the CCMC said Pokhrel took the decision to ban flights on his own without discussing it in a Cabinet meeting earlier on Monday.

Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Yogesh Bhattarai was livid, and there was reportedly a heated exchange at a CCMC meeting on 18 August between Bhattarai and Pokhrel. The lack of coordination between the committee and line ministries has got so bad critics



RSS

accuse the CCMC of running a parallel government – even though it is itself made up of the prime minister, health minister, home minister, defence minister, supplies minister and the Nepal Army.

The CCMS is a government within the government that makes ad hoc decisions without consultations with public health and other experts. There are scandals -- ever since the committee ordered the wrong test kits at inflated prices from middlemen alleged to be political cronies.

As Defence Minister, Pokhrel then ordered the Nepal Army to manage the transport of arriving returnees from Kathmandu airport to holding centres and to their districts.

He also got the Army involved in procurement of test kits and medical equipment from China, but forced it to go through the same tainted middlemen. Last month Army Chief Purna Chandra Thapa testily accused Pokhrel of tarnishing the military's image by blaming it for delays.

The CCMC has also been accused

of bungling on lockdowns, not giving clear guidelines, issuing contradictory protocols for arriving air passengers, and not controlling the movement of people from India.

On the other hand, line ministries have got used to pass the buck to the CCMC on everything from permissions for international charters, the reopening of domestic buses, issuing no-objection letters for students going abroad, allowing private PCR tests, or making private hospitals treat Covid-19 patients. The Ministry of Health, which should be making the critical decisions on control measures, has been sidelined.

"This is the time when the health ministry should be at the forefront, banging the table by lobbying for their suggestions to be implemented, it is unfortunate to see that it is taking the back seat," says Gagan Thapa of the opposition Nepali Congress.

Thapa puts the blame on the spike in Covid-19 cases in the country squarely on the CCMC



CRISIS MANAGEMENT: Defence Minister Ishwar Pokhrel (*above*) heads the Covid-19 Crisis Management Committee that meets regularly to decide on policy, but has been accused of being a parallel government.

because it never had a concrete proactive plan on solving problems like having better quarantine facilities, increasing the numbers of tests, and now making sure there are enough isolation and ICU wards for treatment of seriously ill patients.

"Who is accountable for these lapses?" asks Thapa, who says that giving so much power without responsibility to the CCMC leaves it open to abuse of authority, and prone to making disastrous mistakes.

Nepal's social media is also bristling with outrage against the ruling NCP for being preoccupied with its internal power struggle and not giving enough attention to lessening the impact of the pandemic on the most vulnerable Nepalis like returnees from India and stranded workers overseas.

"Our prime minister has all the time in the world for internal politics in Baluwatar, and he cannot even lead an effective Covid-19 response. It proves where his true interest lies, and the result of the

negligence is here for all to see," says Thapa.

Anil Pokhrel, CEO of the National Risk Reduction Authority who is also an external adviser at the CCMC, agrees that public trust on the agency has eroded largely because of the lack of coordination with implementation agencies. But he adds, "I am not inside in the meetings, but under the circumstances, the government is trying its best to respond to the pandemic."

The National Risk Reduction Authority's predecessor is the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) which was entrusted with reconstruction and rehabilitation after the 2015 earthquake. The NRA had the same problem of coordination.

Because of frequent changes in government after the quake, the head of the NRA was changed three times in one year. There was political interference in its day-to-day operation, and it also functioned as a parallel government.

The only difference between the NRA and the CCMC is that while the NRA was a constitutionally mandated body, the CCMS is an ad hoc committee with unspecified powers. Also, line ministries did not cooperate with the NRA in implementing reconstruction plans because of turf battles, while the CCMC has emerged as an all-power super ministry headed by Ishwar Pokhrel, who it seems is in the habit of taking decisions without consulting experts.

After the feud between Pokhrel and the Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Bhattarai spilled out into the open this week, the CCMC is said to be reconsidering the resumption of repatriation flights this week. 🇳🇵

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Kulman Ghising's tenure at NEA in doubt

Man credited with ending power cuts may not get an extension next month

Ramesh Kumar

Kulman Ghising, the man widely credited with ending daily 14 hours of power cuts is due to step down next month after four years as head of the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA). His term can be extended by another four years, but powerful businesses whom Ghising targeted as well as their political patrons want him replaced.

Ghising is a no-nonsense electrical engineer who knew exactly why Nepali consumers were suffering crippling power cuts, and went about systematically reducing pilferage, and cutting off 24-hour dedicated feeds through which his predecessors had been providing businesses low tariff electricity in return for kickbacks.

He expedited hydropower projects that had been languishing, confronted locals who had obstructed the construction of transmission lines, imported power from India to meet winter shortfall and exported electricity during the monsoon surplus.

Most Nepalis did not care how he did it, but regard him as a saviour who took them from darkness to light.

But as his four-year-term comes to an end, there are those who are envious of the enormous public respect he has earned, as well as others who benefited for years from NEA's favours and want him out.

Through all the smear campaigns against him, Ghising has held fast to his conviction that Nepal's path to prosperity lies in generating enough power so Nepal's 30 million people can switch to electrical appliances, manufacturing and transport, and reduce the growing dependence on petroleum imports.

The statistics say it all. From 2012 to 2016, when Nepalis faced the longest periods of load-shedding, the NEA cumulatively lost Rs25 billion. The greatest annual loss of nearly Rs9 billion was in fiscal year 2015-2016. (See graph)

Ghising was appointed to lead NEA by Energy Minister Janardan Sharma in August 2016 during the prime ministership of Pushpa Kamal Dahal, amidst much resistance from officials who had profited from black marketing electricity.

But Ghising's appointment was a turning point for the NEA and for the country. Within a year of taking over, NEA's profits soared to Rs1.5 billion, and is set to cross Rs11 billion this fiscal year. Even more than lifting the Authority out of the red, it is the assurance of uninterrupted power that has spurred growth and employment in Nepal.

Kulman Ghising has often been called 'Cool Man' by his admirers for his can-do attitude and his obsession with problem-fixing – attributes rare among Nepal's politicians and technocrats. He was educated almost entirely in Nepal, and got his engineering degree from Jamshedpur in India. He has served 22 years in NEA, rising up the ranks to promote rural electrification, manage large projects like Chilime, and deal with Nepal's private power producers.

Starting out, Ghising did not have a magic wand. With experience of the inner workings of the NEA and of handling projects in Nepal, he knew what the problems were. And he did what any manager would do: address the losses on the supply side to ensure that it kept up with demand and growth.

That is why his first order of business was to cut the dedicated

lines providing uninterrupted electricity to industrial barons. He increased their tariffs and prioritised supply to household consumers.

Ghising knew that Nepal's electricity grid had some of the highest rates of pilferage and system loss, even among developing countries. Leakage alone was 26%, and NEA started a campaign against consumers stealing electricity from transmission lines with 'hooks'. By this year, pilferage has been slashed to 15%, saving NEA Rs7 billion.

The next step was to reduce system loss which occurs when the distance between the point of generation to consumption is too long. So, NEA set about upgrading transmission lines, substations and transformers.

Despite all these moves, there was still a shortfall in electricity and Ghising filled this gap with imports from India through the Dhalkebar-Muzaffarpur transmission line. But as NEA's own hydropower plants and private producers started coming online, imports have declined steadily from 35% of total supply for the past five years to 22% this year.

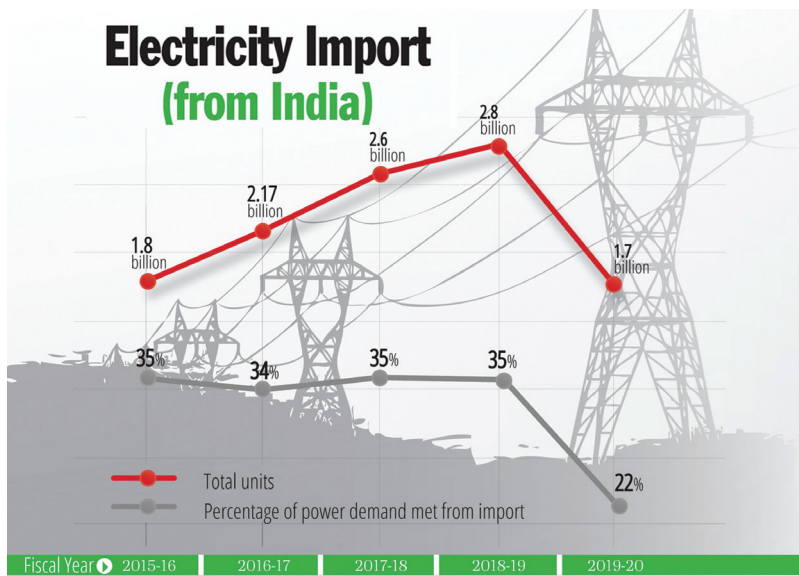
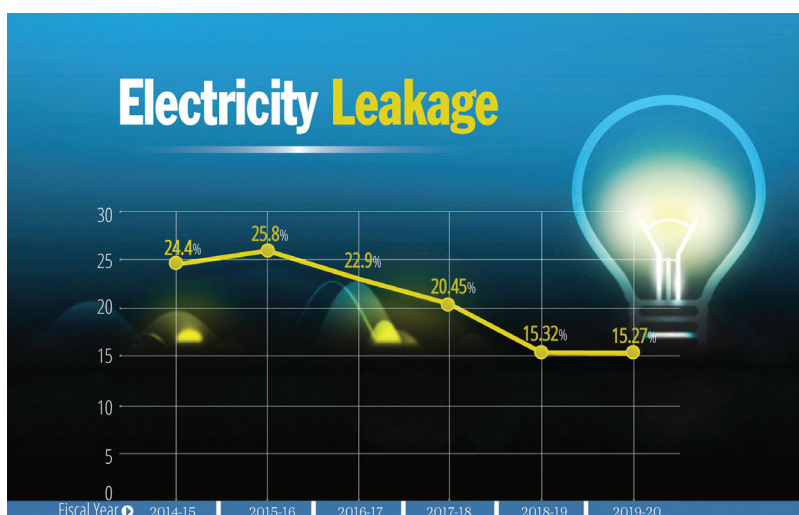
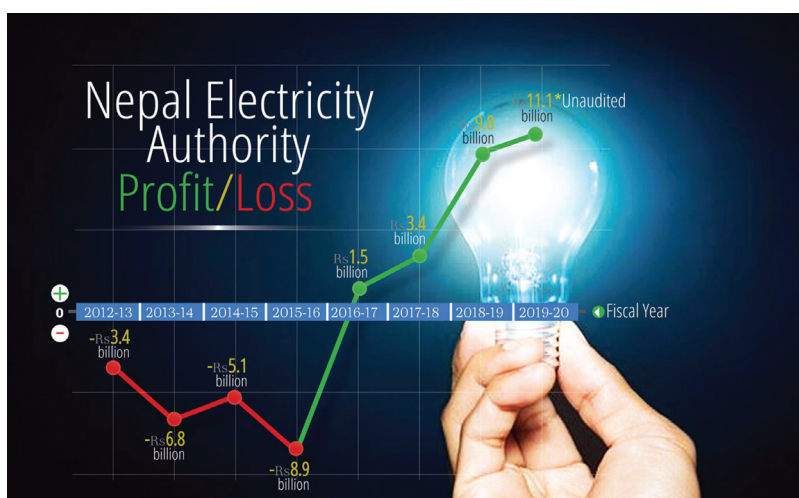
This year's power import from India also dropped because of the COVID-19 lockdown, which reduced domestic demand for electricity, and increased production from Nepal's own run-of-the-river power plants due to a vigorous monsoon.

With the completion of the 453MW Upper Tama Kosi this year, import from India is expected to drop further, even though there will have to be some power import to meet winter demand spike. Nepal's monsoon surplus is expected to grow further in the coming years which is why Ghising has been publicly appealing to Nepalis to switch to induction stoves for cooking, and was opposed to the hefty new tax on electric vehicles announced by Finance Minister Yubaraj Khatriwada in this year's budget.

NEA's revenue has also gone up because of a hike in tariff, despite which demand has also gone up.



GOPEN RAI



NEA's customers have increased by 1.3 million in the past four years, and there has been an annual increase of 20% in electricity demand in that period.

Aside from all these measures, Ghising's main achievement in the past four years has been his ability to dismantle the political-business nexus that created an artificial shortage in electricity that allowed a black market to flourish. NEA's previous heads, dispatchers, and their political patrons all benefited from this scam.

At one point in the winter of 2016 when Nepal was reeling from the aftermath of the earthquake and the Indian Blockade, Nepalis were getting only six hours of electricity a day. Collusion between NEA officials and industrialists was allowing 315MW of cheap electricity to be diverted to businesses at a time when Nepal was only producing 750MW.

Ghising is an outstanding manager with the simultaneous ability to be both a good cop and bad cop. He used his connections with high ranking NCP officials to deflect pressure from those who tried to discredit him. And he could go to the grassroots to convince locals to let transmission lines and substations in Lalitpur, Kabeli corridor, Kulekhani, or Ramechhap that had been delayed for decades due to opposition.

Last year, Ghising went to Rasuwa to personally threaten local contractors who were delaying the construction of a substation critical to evacuating electricity generated by power plants on the Trisuli River. A video of him berating the contractors went viral on social media, further raising his public esteem.

It is not that Ghising does not have critics. Some have said he got all the credit for ending power cuts, when it was the fortuitous completion of the crossborder transmission line that allowed him to end load-shedding with imported power. Some say the NEA's profits are more due to tariff increases than a reduction in leakage. Private power producers also blame him for claiming credit for raising revenue by overcharging them.

Ghising has not been able to move forward on the need to unbundle the NEA's generation, transmission and distribution so as to make the agency even more efficient. However, some say the NEA should not be fragmented because it would make an agency that Ghising has got back on its feet weaker again.

Most of the criticism is fuelled by powerful lobbies against Ghising for sending them overdue electricity bills worth billions. Some industrialists have claimed they never had a dedicated feed, and have been sent a bill. A committee has been formed to look into this, but there has been no conclusion.

Prime Minister K P Oli is said to be personally not in favour of Ghising's extension. Insiders say he has promised the job to Sushil Gyawali, currently the CEO of the National Reconstruction Authority that coordinated earthquake relief. Oli could also be seeing Ghising as someone close to the 'Maoist' Dahal faction of the NCP.

If Ghising is removed, Oli will face public criticism for pandering to cronies and pushing the country once more into the dark ages. It will add to a long list of this government's questionable political appointments, real estate scams, and alleged corruption in the import of medical equipment to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. 🇳🇵

Huge uptick in TikTok during lockdown

“It’s a perfect time to switch to TikTok because I have time in my hands.”

Diya Rijal

India has banned it, the United States and Australia are about to do the same, but here in Nepal TikTok use has soared in the five months since the COVID-19 lockdown was announced.

The Chinese-owned app has taken Nepal by storm, with young people using its 15 second design for an explosion of creativity, and online businesses signing on to promote products ranging from fashion to food. Former royal couple Paras and Himani Shah’s daughters Purnika and Kritika who do mainly dance videos are a hit on TikTok with a massive following.

Two weeks after the lockdown

a Chinese app developer, lets users publish a 15-second or 60-second video, and had seen widespread use in India. Even before the lockdown hit, TikTok already had 600 million active users in India, 44% of the population, and making up over a quarter of downloads worldwide.

There has been criticism of the ban in India, where most users were using it to engage and network, and had empowered the youth among the minorities targeted by the state. However, it was also welcomed by an older section of the population where anti-China sentiments ran high after the Ladakh clash.

After the ban, Tiktok has been partially replaced with the LA-based company, Thiller with has seen 30 million downloads in India since June.

some doctors using TikTok for medical advice, so she started using her platform to spread legal awareness to her viewers. Her first video on how to become a lawyer in Nepal got an astounding 173,000 views. Another video on the legal age of marriage also went viral. She pointed out that underage married women may face problems if they want to file for divorce or report domestic violence.

Just like with other social media TikTok can also be toxic, and Siwakoti faced a backlash for that post and was accused of promoting divorce. Some viewers have also commented that she should become a bar-dancer instead of a lawyer because of dancing videos.

Furthermore, after the lockdown, social media has been

the only method to connect many Nepalis with family and friends in the country and around the world. Social media is no longer considered just unproductive entertainment, and screentime is actually a communication necessity. Internet use has increased 35% in the past four months of the lockdown with Ncell selling special offers for TikTok users.

“Before the lockdown, spending a lot of time on social media would be frowned upon as an idle past time, but now even the older generation

understands the importance of social media,” she adds. While 41% of TikTok users are aged 16-24, many people older are also using this app to publish content. Dance videos and lip-synching Indian tv reenactments are popular.

Anish Tamang is a body painter and TikTok makes up a majority of his make-up and make-up transformation videos.

“It’s been a year since I started using TikTok,” said Tamang. “Viewership has increased in all my social media platforms, and because of the lockdown.”

While TikTok has given many people a platform to demonstrate their creativity, Alex Shiwakoti, who had been on the platform for over two years before ByteDance merged with Musically, says he also gets trolled more for his dances, skits and POV videos.

“During this lockdown, I got a lot of negative comments in Tiktok, which sometimes makes me want to stop using it,” admitted Shiwakoti. “But it is such a great way to reach my audience, I rarely used to interact with people but TikTok changed that.”

In Nepal TikTok is not immune to hate comments, predatory behaviour to younger users, bullying, mature content, and addiction that plagues other platforms. Despite this, TikTok looks like it is here to stay.

Says physician Bharat Pokhrel: “In a nutshell, it has been a learning experience, an entertainment medium, and a way to reach out to the people from different parts of the country with useful advice during the pandemic.” 🇳🇵



coffeddoctor

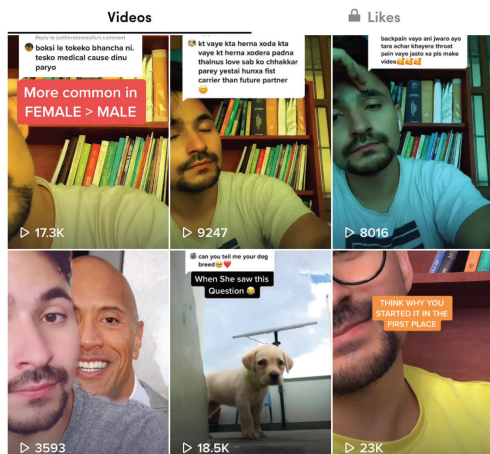
Dr. Pokhrel

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MEDICAL OFFICER BS/MD (MBBS)

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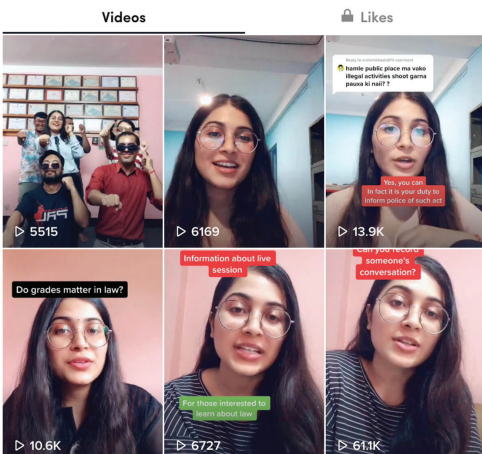
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in March, Bharat Pokhrel, a doctor in Kathmandu started to use TikTok, posting videos of himself and his little sister. Four months later, he has over 13,000 followers and 400,000 likes for his videos, answering medical questions about COVID-19 from viewers.

“I am surprised how much of them have genuine medical concerns. In Nepal this is a huge shift because patients do not always open up and share their actual problems or habits,” says Pokhrel.

Because of the restriction on transport, many Nepalis have been using Tiktok as a form of telemedicine – especially for sensitive mental health issues. The lockdown has led to an increase in mental health problems and suicide cases throughout the country.

“I noticed mental health is a major issue, and many people seek to consult from me via email provided in my bio,” Pokhrel adds.

However, TikTok is more popular among young people showing off their creativity through short video clips of dance routines, lip-synching, branding through influencers, or point-of-view videos – all done with a wide range of editing gimmicks.

While the TikTok ban in India was a tit-for-tat for the deadly border clash in Ladakh in May, and in the US and Australia it is driven by privacy concerns, the underlying reason is the phenomenal rise of the app by a non-Silicon Valley company. With over 800 million active users and 2 billion downloads worldwide, it is the only non-US tech giant in the top five.

TikTok, owned by ByteDance,

Parakram SJB Rana in Kathmandu has been a TikTok user since December 2019, but started posting more frequently after the lockdown. The fashion and lifestyle vlogger has over 20,000 followers, with each video having an average of 50-60,000 views.

“I felt that this was the perfect time for me to do fun stuff on TikTok because I have time to kill,” said Rana, whose TikTok videos include funny skits, voiceovers, and videos with family members. He says engagement on TikTok are higher than other social media he uses.

“The is a way more interaction, which is surprising because I have half the number of followers in TikTok compared to Instagram,” said Rana, who makes a living out of blogging on Instagram. “TikTok is different as it has a way of reaching out to more people. You can easily swipe on videos of people you are not following in your For You Page.”

In the For You page, one can view videos of people they are not following, making it easier for people to gain more interaction and views. Curtis Waters, a Nepali-born singer, was able to promote his song, Stunnin’ using TikTok, which went viral worldwide, and now, has over 50 million streams on Spotify.

Mamta Siwakoti started using TikTok a month into the lockdown as a form of entertainment and would post dance videos, something she otherwise did not have time to do. She said: “TikTok provided me a platform to dance for 15-seconds to a minute, and the easy interface lets me record it and have the audio available for me,” she said.

Siwakoti, who is a lawyer, saw

prabhu Bank BIZ BRIEFS

Global IME CEO

Newly appointed CEO of Global IME



Bank Ratna Raj Bajracharya assumed his position on Monday after being sworn in by bank president Chandra Prasad Dhakal.

Ncell

Ncell has launched the Ultra Wi-Fi SIM+ plus service under its umbrella campaign ‘Plus’, which will be available in all 4G LTE service locations across the country. Per the service, Ncell users can subscribe to get a 40 GB bundled data volume per month to access wireless data services.

Reliance Life Insurance

Reliance Life Insurance issued 6.3 million



units of ordinary shares to the general public from August 20 at Rs100 per share for which Sanima Capital is the issue manager.. The Company is issuing 30% of its share capital amounting to Rs630 million after which the paid-up capital Rs2.1 billion. Sanima Capital Ltd. is the issue manager of the shares.

Citi Express and NIC Laghubitta

An agreement has been signed between Citi Express Money Transfer and NIC Asia Laghubitta under which City Express money transfers can now be conducted from any of the 105 branches of NIC Asia Laghubitta across Nepal.

NIBL and WireBarley

Nepal Investment Bank Ltd. and WireBarley Corp. entered into an agreement to facilitate Nepalis working in Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and the US to send remittance home to their families. The service can be used from the WireBarley mobile app or online portal.

Remittance can be received from Prithivi Remit, the online remittance service NIBL.

Nabil Bank

Nabil Bank has issued a one-time rebate of 0.25% on the rate of interest for the month of Shrawan 2077 to all of its good loan customers as economic activities continue to be disrupted through the first month of the current fiscal year.

Khukri XXX Rum

Khukri XXX Rum has won the Gold award in the Rum category at The London Spirits Competition 2020. Khukri XXX Rum along with Khukri Rum, Khukri Spice, Coronation Rum, and Old Monk, is produced by Nepal Distilleries, which are imported to Europe, Australia, as well as some countries in East Asia.



Zonta award

Dipisha Bhujel of Rasuwa has been awarded the 2020 Zonta International Young Women in Public Affairs (YWPA) Award 2020 along with a cash prize of \$6500. The YWPA program aims to encourage young women from the ages of 16-19 to participate in public affairs and reflect on their voluntary commitment to their school and community.

Cellpay SalesBerry offer

CellPay has collaborated with SalesBerry Department Store for the CellPay SalesBerry Offer, per which customers can avail 15% Discount on purchases from any Salesberry outlet using the CellPay app. The offer is valid until mid-November.

Sunrise Bank

Sunrise bank has contributed Rs7.9 million to the Government-established COVID-19 Infection Prevention, Control and Treatment Fund. Member of the board of directors of Sunrise bank Sharada Sharma Pudasaini handed over the cheque to Finance Minister Yuvaraj Khatiwada.

Shangri-La awarded

Shangri-La Village Resort, Pokhara, has been given the 2020 Customer Reviews Award and the 2020 Traveller's Choice Award by users of online travel companies Agoda and TripAdvisor respectively.



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VIRTUAL EVENTS



#HerJourney
The first guest of Girls in Tech's #HerJourney series, an initiative by Girls in Tech Nepal, is Senior Developer Advocate at Amazon Web Services Rohini Gaonkar, who has over a decade of experience in the IT industry. Registration: Girls in Tech-Nepal Facebook page
22 August, 5pm-7pm

Tulikaa exhibition
Tulikaa is an online platform connecting artists, entrepreneurs, art enthusiasts and collectors in Nepal. Curated by Ujen Norbu Gurung, the third of Tulikaa's exhibition series will feature artist Rajan Pant. Visit the exhibition at tulikaa.com.
28 August



Seven Summits tour
Go on a tour of the seven highest mountains of each continent with mountaineer, social worker, and stand-up comic Shaillee Basnet, who led the first all-women team of seven-summiteers. Register to participate: <http://tiny.cc/x6wmsz>
28 August

ArtAscent's 'Isolation'
Apply to the 'Isolation' international call for artists and writers to share their literal, abstract or in-between interpretation of 'Isolation'. Entries may include artwork, photography, mixed media, installations, ceramics, jewelry, fabric, sculpture, photos of performance art, and works of fiction and poetry. Application fees apply. Details at artascent.com.
Application deadline: 31 August



KIMFF submissions
Submission deadline for KIMFF 2020 is approaching. Fill the entry form and send relevant films directed or produced in the last two years. Go to the website for more details.
Deadline: 1 September



The Skin of Chitwan
Watch the recently launched Indigenous Past, Sustainable Future exhibition 'The Skin of Chitwan' by Nepal Picture Library online at skinofchitwan.nepalpicturelibrary.org

ONLINE ARCHIVES

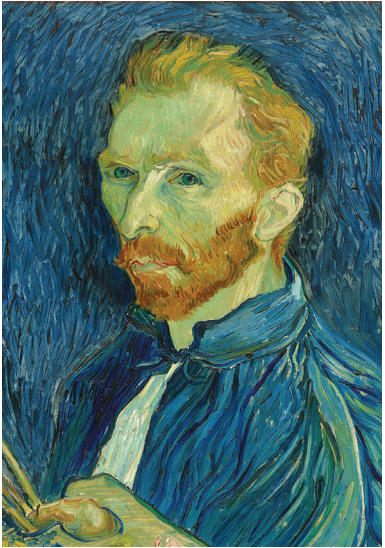


Nepal Picture Library
Look at archived photographs from throughout Nepal's history and learn the stories behind the photographs.

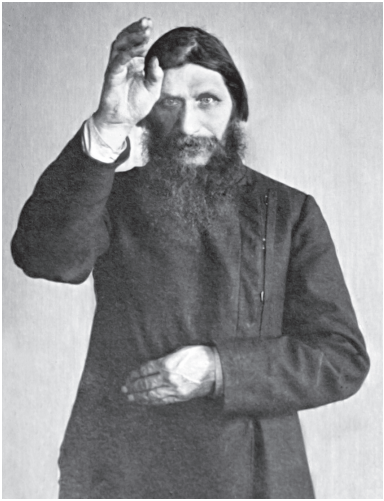
MyLoft
Find thousands of books to read or listen to, from fiction to plays, non-fiction and self development. Check out The British Council's MyLoft App for our and gain free access to educational and recreational resources. Register for the Digital Library at bit.ly/2XB7Vbl.

Books for children
Looking for ways to keep children occupied? The International Children's Digital Library

has children's books from all over the world, including *Adventures of a Nepali Frog* by Kanak Mani Dixit from Nepal.



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



Ridiculous History
History is beautiful, brutal and, often, ridiculous. Episodes of *Ridiculous History* dive into some of the weirdest stories from across the span of human civilisation.

Journeyman Pictures
Watch groundbreaking award-winning factual films about some of the most burning issues across the globe including politics, the environment, and the current pandemic. Find Journeyman pictures on YouTube.

HOME DINING

With restaurants closed, and takeout also off the menu, here some dishes that can be easily make with ingredients available at home.

Gundruk ko achar
There must be very few households that don't have gundruk fermenting in the sun. Have some mustard oil, chillies, lemon and household spices within reach and make some spicy and zingy gundruk ko achar. Break out the old family recipe or get instructions online.



Momo
Home-made momo is another lockdown food that can kill time and fill the stomach as well on rainy afternoons. Round up ingredients at home and get to mincing, packing, and steaming. Divide the prep work and make it a family event. Find dozens of video tutorials on how to start.

Kurauni
Also called khuwa, this creamy dessert requires nothing more than boiling milk. Just be prepared to do a whole lot of stirring. 1 litre of milk makes about 200 grams of kurauni. Enjoy it as is, or look up how to use it to make other delicious Nepali dessert items.



Aloo chop
Great comfort food. Just have a whole lot of potatoes and easily available household spices and vegetables at hand. Also make a simple achar to go with it, but if that's too much effort, ketchup can never go wrong. Find tutorials on Nepali food channel Yummy Food World on YouTube.



Lemonade
There is no greater time than the stifling summer to enjoy a refreshing glass of simple lemonade -- and not the easy peasy lemon squeezy kind. The Stay at Home Chef on YouTube has a simple-to-follow and easy-to-make guide to making real lemonade.

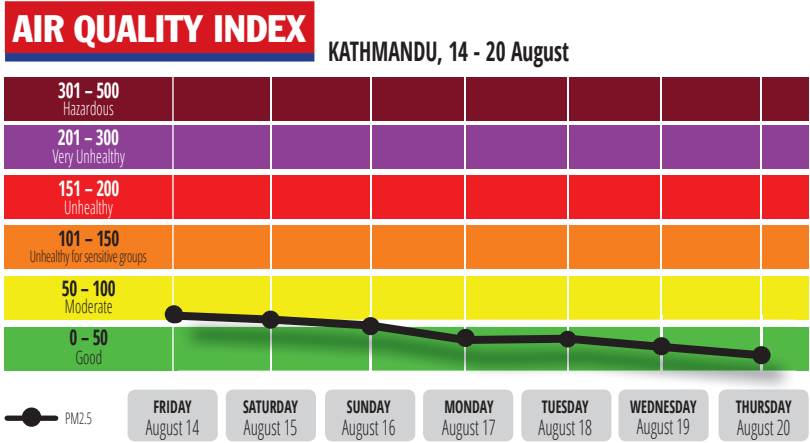
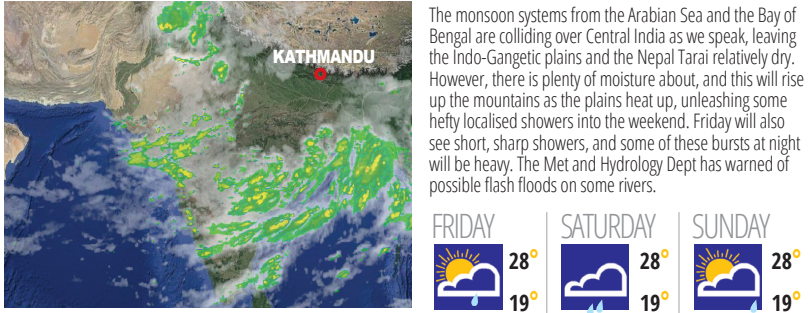
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The daily average Air Quality Index in Kathmandu's city centre on Thursday came down to 36 as a direct result of reimposing of the lockdown in Kathmandu Valley for a week starting Wednesday midnight. Air quality throughout last week was mostly in the green 'Good' zone, thanks to monsoon rains picking up again. With heavy rains projected until Sunday and vehicles off the street for a while, we can at least expect to breathe the clean air which staying at home.

<https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI

KRIPA JOSHI



More and more people nowadays live in urban areas, but lack of space and overpriced land makes it difficult to increase the number of parks and natural spaces. Rooftop, balcony and verticals gardens are the oasis that can provide relaxation and a connection with nature in a busy city. One of the main benefits of rooftop gardens is how they can mitigate the Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect. Because the sun warms up concrete and asphalt faster than it does plants and trees it results in a big zone of hot air that surrounds urban environments. Plants and green spaces help to cool down cities, specially if they cover concrete rooftop, which is a major contributor for UHI. This can have a big impact on our energy bills. These gardens also improve air quality, capture and harvest rainwater and provide insulation to regulate temperatures inside the building and to reduce noise pollution. Furthermore, they give us an opportunity to grow our own food and provide essential habitat for pollinators and wildlife. #FridaysForFuture

OUR PICK

The most awarded movie at the 2019 Sundance film festival, Macedonian documentary *Honeyland* follows Hatidže Muratova, one of the last keepers of wild bees in the remote mountain village of Bekirlija while exploring the themes of climate change and consumerism. The indigenous visual narrative will bring to mind the Gurung honey hunters of western Nepal who risk their lives to harvest honey from cliffs in the Annapurna region. Directed by Tamara Kotevska and Ljubomir Stefanov.

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

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From letters to landlines, phones to Facebook

How social media has transformed the way Nepali workers overseas stay in touch with home

Upasana Khadka

- When Kalim Miya in the UAE and Bhumika in Kuwait found themselves stranded abroad after the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, they took to social media via Facebook Live videos to seek help. Both of them are back in their villages in Nepal now, and attribute the early repatriation to their online outreach that drew them widespread attention.
- The Nepal Embassy in Malaysia holds weekly Facebook sessions with updates and answers to questions which are viewed by hundreds of thousands of Nepali migrants in the country.
- When a video of a Nepali security guard getting beaten up mercilessly by his supervisor in Malaysia went viral earlier this month, it drew attention of the Malaysian authorities, even though similar cases happen on a daily basis and go unnoticed.
- Soon after the explosion in Beirut, Nepalis based in Lebanon were quick to inform their families and each other about their safety via social media.

These are just a few of recent examples where social media has played a key role in spotlighting stories of Nepali migrant communities and their families cope with this unprecedented global crisis. On the one hand, the pandemic demands isolation but on the other the Internet offers connectedness across borders.

"It barely feels like we are abroad these days because we are in such close contact with frequent real-time updates," says Yubraj, who is working in Qatar and the son of Kuma Bahadur, a 60-year-old returnee who had himself worked in Saudi Arabia in the 1990s.

Yubraj recalls growing up and writing letters to his father in longhand and mailing it by post. It would take months to get a reply.

"My father tried to write at least once a month. He used to be curious about tiny details about our farm and the livestock," Yubraj says. "He did not share much about his life in Saudi Arabia."

Perhaps Yubraj's father had nothing to say about Saudi Arabia because he never got to see much of the country. He was brought straight from the airport to the majara farm where he worked, and after a few years he was taken right back to the airport to fly back to Nepal.

Yubraj's letters to his father were mainly messages from his younger siblings, trivia from the neighbourhood, whose water buffalo gave birth, the harvest, and updates about his studies.

"There wasn't anything new or exciting to share about our lives, and the letters were more to keep him connected to home, and to let him know we missed him," adds



Kum Bahadur in 1990s working in a farm in Saudi Arabia



Yubraj as a child in Lamjung when his father was still in Saudi Arabia



Yubraj's Father Kum Bahadur, after returning to Lamjung.



Om Thapa in the UAE in 2001.

Yubraj, who went to the local post office every two weeks to see if there was a letter from his father. He used to get anxious if there was no letter for over a month.

Three years after Kum Bahadur left for Saudi Arabia in the 1990s, the village got its first landline phone. One day the didi from the shop rushed to Yubraj's house to say there was a call. My grand-aunt spoke to my father first and broke down when she heard his voice for the first time in years.

"It was an emotional moment," Yubraj says, adding that the calls were expensive. "Phone calls were short and rare, it was just to hear each others' voices. The details were in our letters."

Years later, in 2007, it was Yubraj's turn to seek his fortune in Qatar. By this time, there was already a landline in his house, but calls were still expensive. So, he still wrote letters to his father, but this time their roles were reversed – his father was in Nepal and he was abroad.

"I still remember the first letter I wrote to my family from Qatar," remembers Yubraj. "I told them about my struggles in the desert heat and the stark contrast with the cool air of Lamjung. I also described to them showers did not help cool off because the water was warm no matter which knob I used."

He tried to sound positive in his letters, just like his father, so his family would not worry too much. But he also wrote to them that he could have achieved more in Nepal itself, had he been willing to work as hard as he did in Qatar. One day, Yubraj saw his manager get a new Nokia 6300, but it took him two years to be able to afford one so he could stay in touch with his family.

Kum Bahadur used to farm in a majara in Saudi Arabia, growing watermelon and camel fodder. He had never understood what a majara was until he visited Nepalis toiling in a farm in the desert.

He says: "It brought tears to my eyes, thinking about how hard my father struggled. We have it much easier now."

In his 24 years in Qatar, Kareem Bakhsh Miya has seen how advances in technology have changed the way migrant workers communicate with families back home.

"We used to send letters or cassettes with 60 minute voice recordings to our family members," he recalls. "I even had pen-friends all over Nepal to whom I wrote frequently. I spent a lot on postage because my letters were so heavy. As a loyal customer, the post office rewarded my family so they were able to send six months of letters for free."

Phone calls were not that fre-



Kareem Bakhsh Miya in Qatar in 1998.

quent, and the closest shop with a landline was 22km from his house in Tanahun. Miya's family had to be notified by the shopkeeper via messengers, including drivers of mini-buses or shoppers, about the day and time when they had to come to the shop for the next call.

"The calls were very expensive, and I had to make chit-chat with the shopkeeper to return the favour," says Miya, adding that a call usually meant there was some kind of emergency. Finally, Miya was able to send home a mobile phone in 2007, after which they could call more often.

"Look how times have changed," he says, "it is more

expensive to send letters now than to make video calls."

Tilu Sharma, who also spent 16 years in Qatar used to send detailed instructions to his family about how to call someone from his labour camp who had a mobile.

"We dreaded calls. For me and other Nepalis in the camp, we knew that if there was a call from home, it usually meant bad news."

Tilu did not write too many letters home, but when he did, he made sure he sent regards and remembrances to everyone in the community, without leaving anyone out. He also knew that the letter

years growing up," says Om.

Om still remembers the rush of excitement when a colleague used to walk in with a pile of envelopes, and call out the names of recipients. "There is nothing like the depth of words and emotion exchanged via letters with my wife in those days, they felt like actual conversations," he remembers.

When his second child was born, Om was working in Saudi Arabia. But by this time there was social media, so he felt more connected because of Facebook.

Bishnu, a seasoned migrant has worked in Malaysia for the past 20



A recent picture of Tilu Sharma and Kareem Bakhsh Miya who have between them spent 40 years in Qatar.

would be read and re-read aloud many times, so it was a public document and had to be simple and legible.

"You didn't just write to your parents and siblings, the letter had to include your neighbors and extended family out of respect," recalls Tilu, who used to send letters with other Nepalis going home.

Om Thapa was in the UAE from 2001-2005 and Saudi Arabia from 2007-2016 and received the first photos of his newborn daughter by mail in the UAE. "I only got to see her for the first time when she was three. I missed a lot of her early

years, and seen the Nepali migrant population grow rapidly since then. He remembers how the Kuala Lumpur neighbourhood of Kotaraya evolved to be 'Little Nepal'.

"Before Facebook and phones, this is where we hung out to meet friends and exchange news from home. We received or sent letters home through acquaintances," Bishnu remembers. "Now we have all the news from home and information about Nepal through social media."

But Bishnu misses the old days: "There was beauty in the simplicity and longing for receiving hand-written letters, or the monthly phone calls we waited eagerly for." 🇳🇵

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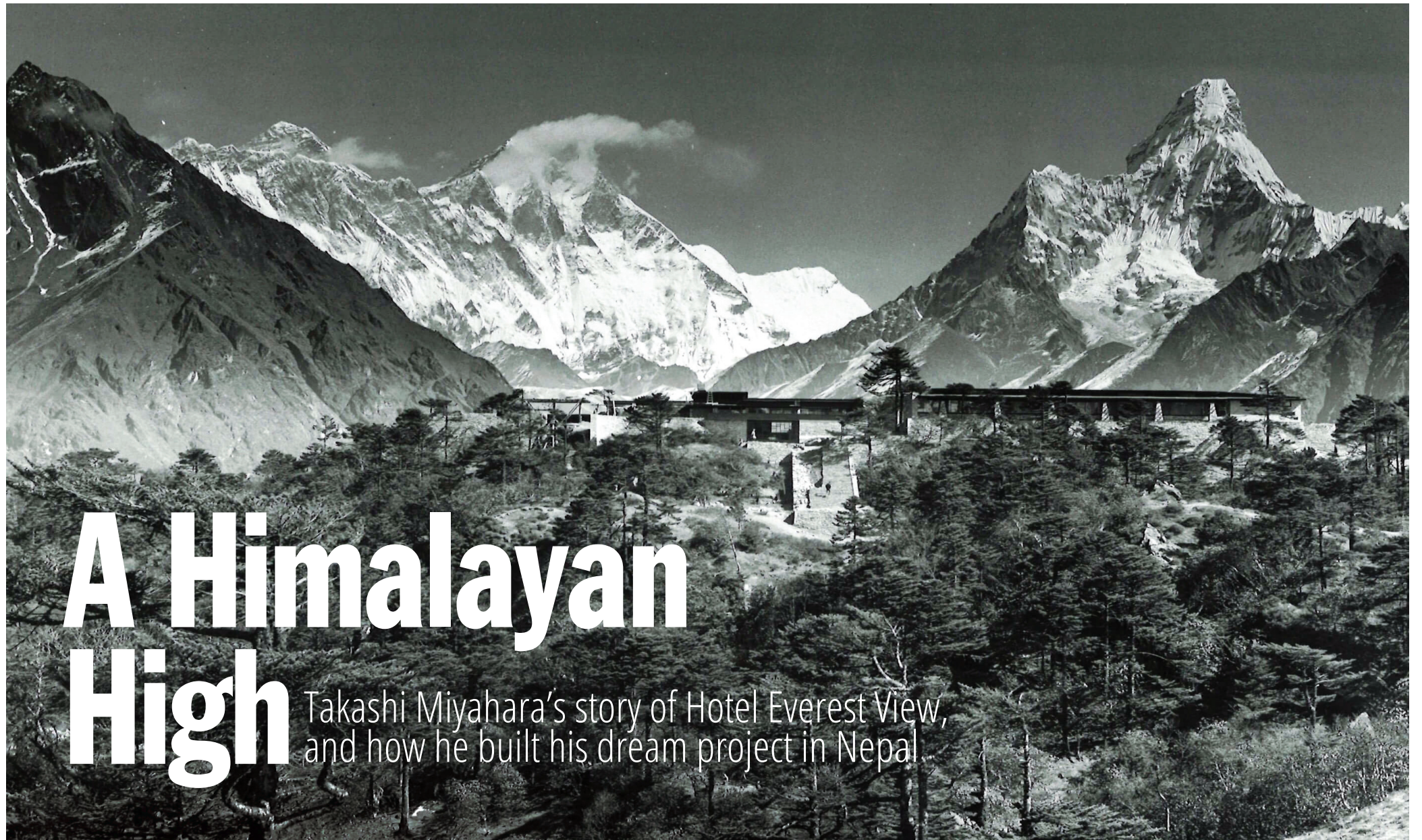
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A Himalayan High

Takashi Miyahara's story of Hotel Everest View, and how he built his dream project in Nepal

Takashi Miyahara was Nepal's tourism pioneer who founded Himalayan Kanko Kitatsu and built Hotel Everest View and Syangboche Airfield 50 years ago. He went on to build Himalaya Hotel in Kathmandu and was working on Hotel Annapurna View in Sarangkot. He became a Nepali citizen in 2008 to contest elections from his Nepal Rastriya Bikas Party. He died in November 2019 at the age of 85.

Nepali Times is printing these translated excerpts from his 1982 book *Himalaya no Tomoshibi: Hote ru Eberesuto Byu O Tateru* :

It all began with a telegram

Two years had passed since I began living in Kathmandu. One day, when I was sitting at my desk in my spacious office, just as I did every day, a telegram arrived.

'About to die like a dog in Namche,' it read. 'Send a plane. Waiting at Lukla. Sakamoto.'

The telegram was written in Japanese, but in the Latin alphabet. Naoyuki Sakamoto was the illustrious mountain climber, and he had set out on foot from Kathmandu towards Everest Base Camp.

I immediately went to the Police Headquarters and had them send a reply: 'Will send plane. Wait at Lukla.' I negotiated for the use of one of the two helicopters of Royal Nepal Airlines that had been donated by the Soviet Union and were dust-covered hulks.

The pilot was a large Nepali with a splendid moustache named Bobby Shah. I was a bit uneasy about whether the helicopter was safe.

"It's fine, it's fine," he said patting me on my shoulder. "Even I don't want to get on a helicopter that's going to crash."

We took off from Kathmandu Airport and I gave a sudden, involuntary gasp. Right before our eyes, the shining white peaks of the Himalaya filled our entire visual field, and seemed to stretch on forever. I was struck by the grand scale and beauty of the landscape unfolding before my eyes, and I spent the flight with my face pressed against the window, completely absorbed.

Despite my concern, the helicopter soon landed at the Lukla airfield, altitude 2,600m. Once the dust settled, we could see Sakamoto and his companions, waving excitedly. Sakamoto, who supposedly

was 'dying like a dog' in Namche Bazar, looked extremely healthy.

Sakamoto and his companions boarded the helicopter, leaving three of us behind. For the first time in a long time, I took deep breath after breath of cold mountain air. We walked to Tengboche where I venerated the monastery, chanting the prayer *Om mani padme hum* which is *Namu myoho renge kyo* in the Japanese version. We went to Khumjung and Khunde where I saw potential for tourism in Nepal. We began talking about the possibility of building a lodge or hotel on the east edge of Syangboche Hill so that people who wanted to see Everest could come and stay there. We would have to have an airfield in a nearby pasture. There were a lot of rocks, but it could take small planes.

The area was called Syangboche, and locals told us the forest used to be so thick that you could lose sight of a yak. I began making serious plans to build a hotel and airfield in that area. The eastern edge of Syangboche is called Om Lhasa, and if I were to build a hotel that would be a good location. I stood on the sun-drenched hill on that bright and shining morning, and my heart was filled with inexpressible joy. There was no more magnificent and massive scenery than this view. There was Ama Dablam ('mother's necklace'), and beyond the ridge that linked Lhotse and Nuptse, was the part of Everest above the 8,000m South Col. To the right of Ama Dablam are Kangtega and Thamserku, and to the south are the Kongde peaks that line either side of the narrow Dudh Kosi river valley. Thamserku looms above, piercing the sky like the tip of a spear.

What is it that makes the Himalaya so beautiful? If I look at them, I realise that it is nothing more than the chiaroscuro of white and black mountains against a blue sky. However, when I *really* look at the mountains, I am overwhelmed and impressed by their beauty. I wonder if it is because of their massive scale, or because of their steepness and perpetual coats of ice and snow. I thought that this was probably the only place where I could build a hotel.

Turning point in Kathmandu

Returning to Kathmandu, I reflected on my two years of life in the city. I was soon turning 34, and did not think about returning to Japan. The dream of constructing the Hotel Everest View appeared to me like a ray of light.

It took us a month and a half to complete the hotel proposal, with the drawing for the building, the estimate for the cost, and the prospective for income and expenditure.

I also knew Harendra Bahadur Thapa, the younger brother of Surya Bahadur Thapa, the prime minister. The day after our meeting with the prime minister, I went to meet Tirtha Tuladhar, the chief director of the Tourist Bureau who had my file already on his desk.

Mr. Tuladhar was a friendly and quiet man, a work-before-talk type of a person – quite rare among Nepali officials. From beginning to end he actively took the initiative in negotiating with the relevant ministries. On 3 September 1968, the construction permit for Hotel Everest View was finally granted.

The next step was to get the permission to build the Syangboche Airport from the Civil Aviation Bureau and discuss the small aircraft service between Kathmandu and Syangboche with Royal Nepal Airlines. Though Mr. Tuladhar was supportive, the Civil Aviation Bureau found the location to be impossible and it was difficult to convince them from the beginning. We registered the company 'Trans-Himalayan Tour Co. Ltd' to operate Hotel Everest View. The company started out with each of us investing one hundred dollars.

When I first came to Nepal, I used to think I might become a science teacher. Nonetheless, things had taken unexpected turns and I ended up running a hotel business, as if to follow my father's footsteps, in Nepal. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree after all.

We were able to gain consent from both villages for the airport as well, under the condition that it will be built on the hill of Syangboche. I explained to the Nepalis that the hotel was not foreign aid, but a source of jobs for them. Whether it be a person or a nation, when you get something, you lose something at the same time. I could not help but

thinking that if Nepal continued to receive foreign aid, it will soon lose the spirit of independence.

Aid also widens the economic disparity between the rich and the poor, between dwellers of cities and mountain villages. I also felt extreme irritation to the fact that the people who deserve the benefit the most tended to be completely forgotten.

In Tokyo

It was 27 December 1968 when I took a break from my 3-year stay in Kathmandu and returned to Japan to prepare for the hotel construction. I was disgusted by the air pollution in Tokyo. Exhaust gas from cars and all the hustle and bustle of the street gave me a headache. Only a few days had passed since I left, but I was already missing the clear air and the bright blue sky of Nepal.

My wife had returned to Tokyo from Kathmandu the previous summer and just given birth to our first son. I had no income and was freeloading off of her family's house in Tokyo. I felt that I had to resolve myself to patiently work on the hotel project while sponging off on my wife's family to survive for a year or two, and find a way for solution.

I asked for support to people in the AACK (Academic Alpine Club of Kyoto) and they readily complied with my request.

Back in Nepal

About a month later, near the end of May, Kuma-san, our architectural designer and I were trying to fly to Lukla by chartering the United Nations' Pilatus Porter PC-6 aircraft in Kathmandu.

Om Lhasa was up on top of a hillock, with its east and south sides steeply falling into the Dudh Koshi River 1,000m below. The construction of the Hotel Everest View was more of an adventure than a business. But at the same time, it was destined to be a business while it was an adventure. We decided to make the hotel to be reasonable in its size, but high in its quality. Therefore the level of the hotel went up a few steps from our original plan.

It would be the first tourists' facility ever to be built in the Himalayan mountains, so it needed to be a model case for the future development of tourism. If we wished to

build it at this location with undoubtedly one of the most beautiful scenery in the world, we needed to refrain from inflicting any kind of damage on the surrounding nature and environment at any cost.

Furthermore, we aimed a notch higher, hoping to bring unity between the hotel and nature, so that it would enhance the value of the natural environment.

As an outsider, I enjoyed the peaceful seclusion of Khumjung, and the views of one peak after another—Ama Dablam, Kangtega, Thamserku, and Kongde—that were to be had simply by sticking my head out of the window. There also seemed to be more simple and honest people there than in Namche Bazar.

Discussion with Sir Edmund Hillary

One day, as my return to Kathmandu was approaching, I heard that Sir Edmund Hillary was in Khumbu Hospital, so I decided to visit him. He brought out a desk and chairs out into the courtyard. I was treated to tea and homemade sweets.

Sir Edmund had been opposed to the hotel which he thought was a bad idea. He was urging the Nepal government to halt the project, and had written letters to the Japan Alpine Society, telling them to persuade me to give up the idea.

"I've heard of our plan, but your objectives are different from those of the Himalaya Trust, so it's problematic," Sir Edmund said. "It is a bad idea to use a place like this for commercial purposes, such as a hotel. It will destroy the Sherpa culture."

I replied that my motivation for building a hotel was not commercial.

"If that's the case, wouldn't it be just fine to build it in Pokhara instead of here?" he asked.

"Pokhara would certainly be another good site, but anyway, I'm not just hoping to build a hotel, it would be an effective means of promoting tourism in Nepal."

Sir Ed said: "I think Khumbu needs other things more than it needs a hotel."

We were really talking past each other.

"You probably won't give up that idea of building a hotel, will you? It's just that I love the environment of Khumbu and the Sherpa people. Please take care not to harm them."

I assured him we would not. Certainly, a hotel in the middle of the Himalaya, not to mention near Mount Everest, was an issue that required careful consideration. I agreed with Sir Ed, but I was going ahead with it.

When Sir Edmund first came into contact with the Sherpas, he must have been deeply impressed by their culture and their commitment to mountain climbing. It is not hard to imagine that he did not want them to lose those attributes.

But what is ‘culture’? Preserving the Sherpas’ culture did not mean preserving it just as it was, as if in a museum, but respecting the human society that gave rise to the Sherpa’s honesty, cheerfulness, concern for others, pride, and philosophy, and doing nothing to ruin it.

Sir Edmund Hillary and our fundamental ideas were the same, but our respective efforts were leading us in different directions. So, in the end I had to say this to him: “In order for a local community or a country to experience true development, isn’t it more important for the local people to have autonomy rather than to receive charity or assistance.”

Opening Day

So, finally, it was the day of opening the hotel. The day before the first guests of Hotel Everest View were supposed to arrive at Lukla.

On the day of the arrival of the first guests, we departed late in the morning from Monjo so that the hotel could get even closer to completion. We climbed up the slope to Namche Bazar *bistarai* (slowly) to buy more time. At this altitude, we never should walk in haste to begin with. When we came to a place where the hotel was visible, I sent out a messenger to ask them if cleaning up was done. We took a long halt until a ‘OK’ came back as the answer, making an excuse that if we hurry too much it may cause altitude sickness. And at last, the guests entered the hotel.

However, we found the lobby being packed with the villagers. Close to a hundred spectators had gathered from the Khumjung Village, and the guests had to struggle through the crowd to get to guest rooms. It was far from what I would call a stylish hotel opening.

Glass for the hallway windows were sent out from Kathmandu a month ago, but snowfall had stopped it on Ramju Ra at 3,600m, which shut down the traffic over the pass and kept our load on the other side of it. We quickly sent 50 well-equipped porters from Namche Bazar for the rescue, but the load could not make it on time for the guests’ arrival.

For dinner, the meal was cooked in the wind-swept kitchen carried into the dining room, where they were served swiftly on plates warmed up in a bucket of hot water. Some of us had to hold plywood against the wind so that it would not blow through the dining table. The next day, the weather was fortunately fine, and the Himalayan mountains towering high against the blue sky was clearly visible. Everyone seemed happy to be there. The view of icy peaks was sublime.

One of the motivations behind my coming to Nepal was that I would much rather live under the brilliant rays of the sun in the blue sky and among the greenery of nature, than in a society incarcerated inside concrete. However, I had to ask myself – have I been acting consistently with the same attitude and love towards nature in Nepal?

The tourist industry is also one that can easily spoil nature, society and culture. And here I am, cutting down more than a few trees in the Himalaya and constructing a hotel, and scraping off a meadow to build an airport. Is it really acceptable – for a foreigner that I was – to lordly execute such acts, to brandish pretexts such as ‘modernisation’?

In the face of this question, I found the necessity to think deeper about the true nature of ‘develop-

ment’ including my own acts. Modern materialistic society requires humans with economic efficiency rather than humanity, eventually making us forget the nobility of the spirit.

Even when human beings pursue economic efficiency, ‘development’ need to be constantly balanced with humanity, wisdom and the necessity of control and limit the speed and range of development.

Especially for Nepal, not yet contaminated by a material civilisation, I personally hoped for the spirit of humanity to prevail while striving for development. From the viewpoint of technology and an industrial civilisation, Nepal was far behind. Yet it also shows us an alternative way of life, which is proof that the material way is not the only path for human beings. Nepal could very well be the place to create a new value system.

However, at the present stage, Nepal may need to modernise even if it was going to cause a few problems, in order to lift living standards of its people. I do not say this with the intention to justify Hotel Everest View and its airport. Maybe we need to be economically stable before we can achieve a richness of spirit.

This was when I started to put into action what I had been only vaguely thinking about till then – to establish an experimental farm in the Khumbu Valley to increase agricultural productivity without using chemical fertilisers and pesticides. It could be the source of fresh organic vegetables for the hotel.

Finally, Syangboche Airfield

On August 2 1971, we held the ground-breaking ceremony for the airport construction. Ngawang Tenzin Lama from the Tengboche Monastery kindly performed the blessings. Village chiefs of both Khumjung and Namche Bazar, government officials and many others attended the ceremony.

Dynamite could not be purchased by private individuals, and the bulldozer had issues of possibly high cost and the import approval. I had a secret plan to bring a bulldozer as machinery aid from the Japanese government through the embassy in Kathmandu. We decided to disassemble the bulldozer into parts small enough for a porter to carry – except for the engine block – and send them to Lukla by Twin Otter aircraft. The engine block weighed about 300 kg, and since it could be a big mess if we tried to dismantle it, we decided to charter a helicopter and fly it directly into Syangboche. We managed to transport the two lumps of iron that are bulldozers from Lukla to Syangboche with the help of 200 porters and taking ten days.

Finally, the time to start the bulldozers had come. Put the key in, warmed up cylinders for a while, then turned the key to the other direction. Vroom, vroom! It started on the first try. We roared and shouted in joy.

When the trekking season came to an end in May, the work at the airport was at its height, the hotel also needed a lot of work, including making the facility more substantial and completing the interior decoration. Two tons of dynamite from India was finally starting to arrive, carried by porters from Lamosangu since they could not be transported by plane. The silence of the mountains was broken by the thunderous explosions that echoed and reverberated.

Bulldozers, rock drills and dynamite were the three sacred treasures in Syangboche. We had to use them carefully, since the supply of parts could be difficult. We built an ideal ‘altiport’ with a 700m and inclination of 4-5 % at the threshold, gradually increasing to the maximum of 16 %, at the apron end.

At the end of May, after two years of working with two bulldozers, two rock drills and 1.6 tons of dynamite, the airport was finally ready for a Royal Nepal Airlines Pilatus Porter. June 1, 1973 was the day of the test flight and I woke up before the day-break, stepped outside and checked the sky. Staff of the hotel ran to the

villages of Namche Bazaar, Khumjung and Kunde to tell everyone that the test flight will take place as planned. If the aircraft successfully landed, I’d have to buy a drum of *chhang* and have everyone join the celebration. We must drink our heads off.

At 8 AM, I heard the whine of an engine in the distance. It was a tiny dot at first, but it got bigger, the sun reflecting off its wings. It circled twice over the airport, then headed to the base of Thamserku, banked and made a straight-in approach to a runway that was built with our sweat and tears.

The villagers shouted with joy, and every one ran towards the aircraft. It was the scene I had dreamed of countless times in the past five years. Because I wished for it for so long, and because so many things had happened and such a long time had passed, I sometimes had to remind myself of the original purpose of my wish.

Pushing through the crowd of people, Capt Emil Wick approached me with a big smile. The Swiss pilot had first come to Nepal in 1960, flying a Pilatus Porter for the Swiss Dhaulagiri expedition. Since then, he had been flying in Nepal. This legendary pilot was the one who gladly volunteered for the test flight.

The hotel finally started its formal operation using the Syangboche Airport. However, running it was as difficult as its construction. The work at the hotel was more like the base camp of a mountaineering expedition. We had to plan the logistics for guests, the weather was unpredictable, and sometimes trekkers with injuries had to be evacuated.

The air service between Kathmandu and Syangboche, was not sufficient at all. Royal Nepal Airlines was supposed to have two flights a day, but they did not fly even a half of that number. This situation continues today, and it has been the biggest impediment for the operation of the hotel.

Bikas or Binas?

Living in Kathmandu, I often receive the two questions from Japanese people visiting Nepal. “What can be done if we wanted to help Nepal?” or “Aren’t people in Nepal lacking desire to improve themselves, or having little desire to make things better?” I gave vague answers because I, too, cannot deny these impressions.

Nevertheless, I always felt great irritation. The questions seem to include pure goodwill, so why was I troubled by them? It may be because support and charity did not address the roots of the problem, and could even be harmful. Or maybe because I thought the need ‘to do something for them’ often turns out to be just self-righteousness.

Support and charity often have a tendency to pass right through



essential factors in the development and growth of a nation, such as the democratisation of the society, capacity development for the people, or the cultivation of an independent spirit. They often connote the dilemma of not being any help for the people at the face of poverty, rather furthering the injustice.

The hotel was finally off and running. But even though every necessity for guests were provided, there was still a lot of work to be done. The airport work also stopped after being made just enough for Pilatus Porters.

Nepal’s civil aviation policy meant that we had to depend on Royal Nepal Airlines which was often not reliable. This is one of the reasons why the business performance of the hotel operation still is in the red. We are not anywhere close to reinvesting profits locally, and are always short of cash.

Was the hotel just a vanity project of selfish foreigners with immature ideology volunteering to build a hotel? Or should we be satisfied with the result, thinking we accomplished our original goal however small it may be? Should we convince ourselves that it is the accumulation of these initiatives that contribute to the development of a society?

The Hotel Everest View project is not a failure because it is managing somehow to make both ends meet in cooperation with other projects. We cannot look at its business aspect in isolation. I have no intention of calling this project a private hobby. To think of it that way would be disrespectful to all those who cooperated to make it happen.

Why then, do I still have nagging doubts? It has nothing to do with the fact that the hotel is still running at a deficit. I suspect it is that the hotel is not directly connected to social productivity in Nepal.

However, the present condition of Nepal is far away from conducive for foreign investment. To attract foreign capital, stability in politics and economy, the morality and awareness of its people are important. There is really no need for Japanese companies to invest in Nepal, profits are too low and the risks too high. Despite that we brought in investment. Unfortunately, the economy in Nepal has not been growing. Depending so much on foreign aid means that the significance of private investment has weakened. Lateral communication within the government looks awfully disunited.

Sixteen years have passed since I started to live in Nepal, and fourteen since I came up with the plan for the Hotel Everest View. Years gone by – as they are known to do – flying by at the blinking of an eye. The past recedes at a quick pace. Time passes. 🇳🇵





Learning from HIV to fight Covid-19 in Nepal

The country's experience in HIV/AIDS prevention in the last 20 years holds lessons in tackling the spread of the novel coronavirus

Sonia Awale

When Lalbahadur Shah of Birganj died last week, none of his relatives showed up for his funeral even though he tested negative for Covid-19. With no family, friends and neighbours attending, the Muslim community members took it upon themselves to perform his final rites as per the Hindu faith.

Shah had hypertension and diabetes, although he had tested positive for SARS-CoV-2, he had recovered from the infection. He succumbed to other health complications.

Across Nepal, people infected with the virus, even those who have recovered, have been shunned by neighbours and society. Migrant returnees and their families have been singled out and humiliated. Doctors and health workers have been harassed by landlords.

This is nothing new in Nepal. Tuberculosis and leprosy patients have been traditionally shunned. And the stigma associated with Covid-19 is very reminiscent of how people with HIV/AIDS used to be treated in Nepal in the past, and may have lessons for dealing with SARS-CoV-2, since the virus (like HIV) is here to stay.

"Physical distancing doesn't mean discrimination and we should make people understand this," says public health expert Aruna Uprety. "There is widespread panic about Covid-19 and this is turning people against those infected with it, exactly like it was with HIV/AIDS. This in turn is adding to the mental stress of the patients, undermining their recovery."

Says Anjana Rajbhandary, a counsellor and columnist: "Social stigma is attached to lack of knowledge and when people know less, they feel the need to blame someone else because they are afraid of the unknown. Fear and anxiety about death and disease can lead to gossip, which results in stereotyping and discrimination."

Constant focus in the mass media on new infections and fatalities over those who have recovered has reinforced the misconception that Covid-19 is highly lethal, adding to the fear about it.

On Tuesday, Nepal reported a total of 1,016 new cases, its highest daily rise with 205 in Kathmandu Valley alone, forcing the local governments in Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur to reimpose lockdown for a week starting Wednesday midnight. So far, 17,580 people have recovered while 114 have passed away.

The number of new infections was down to 671 on Wednesday, 151 of them in Kathmandu Valley.

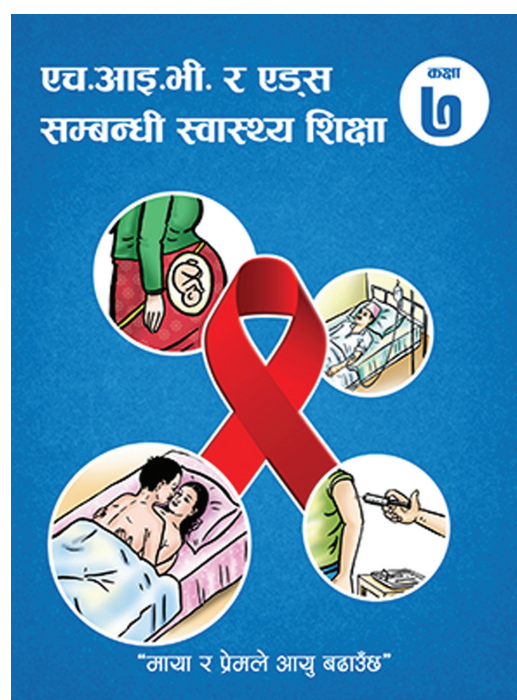
The similarities between HIV/AIDS and Covid-19 goes beyond stigma. Just like HIV/AIDS spread like wildfire in western Nepal among families with husbands working in India, most of the Covid-19 cases were imported from India and spread among the poorest sections of Nepal's most underserved region. And just like with HIV, Covid-19 is felling people with compromised immune systems.

Long-time HIV/AIDS activist Rajiv Kafle also sees parallels between the current Covid-19 crisis and the HIV epidemic of the 1990s in turning public awareness into behavioural change for prevention. Both diseases are caused by viral infections and attack the immune-compromised – only the method of transmission is different. While HIV is spread through unprotected sex, sharing needles or blood transfusions, SARS-CoV-2 spreads human-to-human through aerosol particles.

"As with HIV, I see a lot of denial about coronavirus. Back in the day, peer-pressure led people to partake in highly risky behaviour like sharing syringes. Peer-pressure today can be seen in the form of people pulling



BIKRAM RAI



INFECTIOUS MESSAGES: An HIV/AIDS awareness booklet for Grade 7 by the government in Nepal depicting the modes of transmission (*left*) and a new poster showing preventive measures for Covid-19, also illustrating which behaviour is risky.

down their masks in presence of friends," says Kafle.

Mass media was a crucial tool in the battle against HIV/AIDS in the days before social media. In particular, tv serials and docudramas featuring popular faces like comedian duo Madan Krishna Shrestha and Hari Bansa Acharya were highly effective in creating awareness about preventive measures such as safe sex and clean needles as well as in



lessening the stigma for some 50,000 people living with HIV in Nepal.

Nearly 30 years later, Shrestha and Acharya are once more doing skits for public service announcements via social media and tv to spread awareness about Covid-19 preventive measures. The message is similar: while it was condoms and safe needles for HIV/AIDS, it is masks and distancing for Covid-19. "If we were able to change peoples' be-

haviour in something as sensitive as sex, then we should be able to do it much more effectively for Covid-19," says Rita Thapa of Nepal Public Health Foundation, who was formerly with the WHO. "We still have time to work together with local authorities, civil society and the government to run mass awareness campaign that reaches down to the grass-roots."

Since this August, the government has started providing free TLD (once-a-day generic fixed-dose combination of tenofovir disoproxil fumarate, lamivudine, and dolutegravir), new antiretroviral drug considered the best regimen in the world for 17,000 people living with HIV in Nepal. Activists like Kafle credit this milestone to treatment literacy, community mobilisation and continued activism.

"Only a similar kind of dedication will guarantee accountability and transparency in terms of testing and treating coronavirus in Nepal when the vaccine and therapies aren't available," he adds.

Aruna Uprety recalls a recent field visit to Makwanpur district where she found Chepang nomads living without toilets or clean drinking water, who were not wearing masks and maintaining distance.

"It is now pretty clear we will have to learn to live with Covid-19 just as we did with HIV. What would help is strengthening our immune system to fight against the infection, be it by applying traditional medicinal or by eating nutritious indigenous food," says Uprety. "But to prevent infection for now our first line of defence are masks, distancing and hand-washing." 🇳🇵