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BIKRAM RAI

# Muddling through

The sight of jumbled up signs for seven provinces at Kathmandu airport (above) is symbolic of the shambles things in Nepal are in. Nearly half-a-year of lockdown later, there are still 150,000 Nepali workers overseas waiting to return. Some of those who came back from India have started going back because they could not find jobs in Nepal.

Although limited scheduled flights have started, returning Nepalis still have to inexplicably wait for up to 7 hours at holding centres even if they have PCR negative reports. Hygiene

precautions at the airport are rudimentary.

As public pressure builds up, the government on Wednesday loosened up on some of the restrictions even though Kathmandu Valley is still recording a surge in cases. On Thursday there were a record 572 new coronavirus cases in the Valley, out of 1,246 for the rest of the country. Nine more fatalities were recorded nationwide, three of them in Kathmandu Valley.

Three weeks of restrictions, instead of bringing down the cases in Kathmandu Valley

saw an increase – meaning the virus is spreading within families and communities. But economic desperation increased public pressure on the local administration to relax the rules.

The government's strategy seems to be to loosen up some more after 17 September, allow long-distance buses and domestic airlines to resume so people can return to their districts for the festival season. If there is another spike, they may lock down the Valley again over Dasain, which this year is 23-28 October.

If needed, officials have hinted they can then deploy the

military at checkpoints so the Valley is isolated from the rest of the country.

The new rules that went into effect on Thursday are so complicated that even police enforcing them are confused about what is allowed on which days.

Food shops can open from 5-11AM, and 5-7PM. Department stores, shopping malls and other shops can open Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays. Garment stores, furniture shops, and garages are open on other days of the week, while restaurants can provide

takeaways from 12-7pm. Taxis and motorcycles are back on the roads. Bigger buses are allowed, but there were few on the road Thursday because many preferred not to get on them.

The detailed do's and don'ts are ambiguously worded. The directive states that 'services similar to the above' will also be allowed. Experts also questioned how wise it is to limit opening time for shops because it could lead to overcrowding.

*Alisha Sijapati*

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# Leaders in Isolation

Until vaccines and therapies are available, we in Nepal like everywhere else in the world, have to learn to live with this scourge. Good sense has prevailed and the CDOs of Kathmandu Valley met at the Home Ministry on Wednesday and decided to be smarter about the lockdown, allowing people greater freedom and asking them to take necessary precautions to remain safe.

But something is not quite right about the way this decision has been taken. By handing over discretion on lockdowns to CDOs across the country who are under direct command of the Home Ministry, the government is passing buck. Leaders in Kathmandu forgot that Nepal is a now a federal state, decision-making has been devolved to local governments.

The most effective strategy to deal with the pandemic is to let elected local leaders to decide how to handle it, with the central government only ensuring that they have adequate resources, equipment and medical personnel. Unfortunately, the national level leaders are taking self-isolation a bit too seriously, and are nowhere to be seen. They have centralised power, and have gone into hiding with it.

What we do see every day is the Nepal Ministry of Health's coronavirus press briefing. It is an endless listicle of statistics read out by Jageshwar Sharma Gautam, who may be a fine obstetrician and gynaecologist, but has such dreary delivery that he should have been the last choice for a spokesperson.

During the Vietnam War, the US military had daily press briefings at Saigon's Rex Hotel which were called the 'Five O'clock Follies' in which a spokesman read out a long list of American victories that day. Invariably, the number of Viet Cong dead would exceed American fatalities by a factor of ten.

Prof Gautam's four o'clock briefings are beginning to sound like that. During the Covid-19 emergency, this should have been the job for a person with extraordinary communication skills, and a screen personality that commands credibility and respect. Most readers will agree that Prof Gautam has none of

those attributes, even though by now many of us have got used to his visage and voice.

Do a video search on Google and you will find a clip of the good doctor picking his nose ahead of his daily televised briefing. Good thing he was not live on tv then, but this unhygienic on camera performance has been immortalised on YouTube.

To be sure, replacing the spokesperson is not the most serious or most urgent problem that needs to be fixed right now. But it is an indication of the lack of professionalism for a job that needs a person with effective communication skills to combat an infectious disease in which communication is the first line of defence.

The soporific teleprompter recitation of the day's statistics delivered in a deadpan monotone does not reflect the seriousness with which we should be responding to this contagion.

The media is also partly to blame for carrying the briefings live, and using it as a filler in the evening tv bulletins. There is very little analysis of the figures, how the total confirmed cases are functions of how many tests are done, and who is tested. Or what the positive rates are for contact traced people. Also, asking questions like why schools should be closed in districts with no or very few cases.

To some extent, scaring the people is effective. Otherwise, with the easing of restrictions in Kathmandu Valley, we will again get the kind of reckless behaviour that followed the lifting of the lockdown on 21 July that resulted in the current surge. But there is no need to unnecessarily panic the public. After all, SARS-CoV-2 has an identical mode of transmission as another deadly pathogen, the tuberculosis bacillus, which has for centuries been endemic in Nepal.

As the Nepali Congress MP and former health minister Gagan Thapa wrote on a social media post this week: 'The political leadership is hiding behind the CDO and the bureaucracy, they don't have the guts to address the people directly ... the people's patience is running out and it could explode at any moment.'



## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

20 years ago during the week of 13-19 September 2000, Nepali Times #9 reported on the government's negotiations with the Maoist rebels, and the tussle within the Nepal Congress party. Even after two decades, the protagonists are still the same - Sher Bahadur Deuba, Ram Chandra Poudel and members of the Koirala clan.

Mukul Humagain's report 'A trickle of hope on the Bagmati' is on the two projects working side-by-side to clean the Bagmati River at Pashupatinath. However, even after three project chiefs and Rs310 million, Bagmati continues to remain polluted. It is still a sewer, with delays in finishing Kathmandu's drainage network.

Twenty years ago, it was predicted that HIV infected cases in Nepal could reach up to 200,000. While Nepal struggled to overcome the epidemic of HIV/AIDS in 2000, there are lessons to be learnt in grappling with the Covid-19 pandemic two decades later.

*Excerpts from the stories:*

**Peace in pieces:** Peace is on everyone's lips: they're just not doing much about it. One politician more than any other has staked his political career on peace: Sher Bahadur Deuba. But he is caught in a web of intrigue within his own party, and can't make his move. "The talks are now at a standstill," Deuba admitted to us in a candid interview. The Maoists are really not in a big hurry to talk. They have already made their political point by stating their willingness to negotiate, even as they plan for their post-monsoon offensives. For its part, the government is spending Rs 6 billion to raise a paramilitary police force and



deploy new weapons. It wants to wield a bigger stick before agreeing to sit down.

**A trickle of hope on the Bagmati:** Three projects chiefs and Rs 310 million later, the Bagmati remains as polluted as ever. But things may be about to change for the better. At least for the stretch that flows by the holy Pashupati Temple Complex. In its first and second phases, the Project concentrated on the Bagmati above the Pashupati area, given the religious significance the river has to Hindus as it flows by the cremation area at Aryaghat. The plan is to set up a sewage treatment plant beyond the Gujewori temple at Tamraganga, to which all the sewers between Gokarna and Mitra Park will be connected.

**Higher HIV risk:** The AIDS epidemic in Nepal is spreading into the general population because of unprotected sex and drug use. And it is no longer confined to 'high risk' groups like sex workers, truck drivers, and drug users. The latest results from a survey conducted by the STD/AIDS Counselling and Training Services (SACTS) on behalf of Family Health International (FHI) show just how explosive the growth of the epidemic is. Of the 300 sex workers interviewed earlier this year, 17.3 percent were HIV positive. Between 30-60,000 Nepalis are infected, and it could reach up to 200,000 in the next 10 years. Nepal used to be a "low prevalence" country till recently, today it faces the prospect of a "concentrated epidemic".

**From the archives of Nepali Times of the past 20 years, site search: [www.nepalitimes.com](http://www.nepalitimes.com).**

## ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

I wish all these disappeared persons would return home someday ('Only memories remain', Bikil Sthapit, nepalitimes.com). Such a touching archive, memory really does matter. We need to house these precious possessions in a museum.

**Rajendra Senchurey**

## ERIKA LEUCHTAG

This is an interesting read, an important piece of history not to be forgotten ('Erika and Kring Tribhuvan', Alisha Sijapati, #1026).

**Hima Bista**

## TOURISM POST COVID

The first step to recovery is to allow tourists back in the country ('Nepal tourism may take 5 years to resume', nepalitimes.com). I visit Nepal every year, and often two times. Some countries are opening up, it's time for Nepal to do so too with safety precautions in place.

**Robert Kay**

- This is a pessimistic approach. Optimistic approach is to use the current slowdown to revamp Nepal tourism by improving its shortcomings and find a fresh strategy to launch Nepal in an era post Covid.

**Santa Subba**

- If it is going to take 5 years for tourism to resume, there is enough time to install bicycle lanes and rickshaw service in historical sites, create car and motorbike free city centres, clean up rivers and reduce plastic waste, restore cultural heritage and architecture and develop new trekking trails instead of building poorly formulated infrastructure.

**Eckhard Schröder**

- Tourism will grow and if Nepal can juggle its products and cartels get out of the way, recovery can be accelerated.

**Sujeet Shakya**

- Government's only expertise seems to be imposing lockdown. It must be the easiest way to govern at this stage.

**Chandra GT**

- This would be a good opportunity to design a framework for high value low, volume sustainable tourism strategy.

**Arup Rajouria**

## COVID-19

While it's relief that Nepal didn't have to witness such a worst-case scenario as projected by the study ('Nepal experts reject Covid-19 model', Sonia Awale, nepalitimes.com). The current situation could have been much different if government acted efficiently in the beginning.

**Umesh Rai**

- Given the current incompetent leadership and lack of public understanding and support, this could very well be true in the coming days.

**Pratisha Joshi**

- I think questioning the study's methods and assumptions are good. I also think disagreeing with the findings needs an alternative explanation of the reality that the experts actually know. Arguing that the estimated numbers as 'far from reality' is futile as the estimate has specified a high margin of error and have listed plenty of limitations.

**Sushil Koirala**

- We are just beginning to see what works what not ('Epidemiologist Mahesh Maskey on Nepal lockdown' youtube.com). The difference is in the understanding. Authoritarian police state methods against its own population are a sign of weak governance.

**Marjolaine Hohberger**

- Since the world will have to live with the virus for a while, keep safe and get on with your life ('Flights to Nepal limited by airport capacity', nepalitimes.com).

**HB Neupane**

## INDRA JATRA

Don't miss this beautiful story of Indra Jatra ('Walkabout with Anil: Indra Jatra, tales of two flowers' youtube.com). Special Thanks to Kunda Dixit and the *Nepali Times* team for creating, curating and communicating this wonderful series.

**Deepak R Joshi**

- Bring more of such content *Nepali Times*. I have been following the walkabout series and absolutely love it.

**Ashmin Bhattarai**

- Wonderful article by the late Desmond Doig about our rich culture and heritage ('The legend behind the myth of Indra Jatra', nepalitimes.com). Never knew that a Nepali king participated in Mahabharata.

**Sandeep Gurung**

## MACHINDRANATH

Sad to see a festival like this dissolve into violence ('Police stop Patan chariot pulling citing Covid-19', nepalitimes.com). There's far more going on than just COVID. There's a battle for culture, freedom & safety, akin to other parts of the world.

- It's good to follow tradition but not blindly. Rioting during the pandemic is dangerous, people need to understand that coronavirus is very contagious and could create havoc in Nepal if it goes uncontrolled.

**Tseten Tashi**



## Health workers battle Covid-19, but also stigma

by Sonia Awale

It is not just the novel coronavirus that is spreading in the community, but also fear of frontline health workers. They are being ostracised, publicly humiliated and threatened. Read this report about how some are spreading kindness.

**Most reached and shared on Facebook**

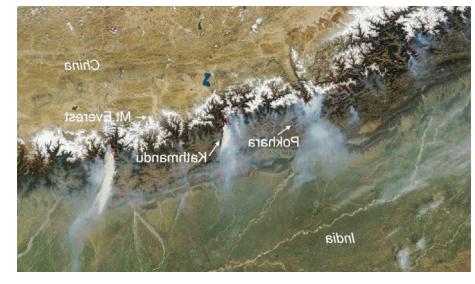


## Ministry of Education gets an F

Editorial

The lassitude to address remote classes in government schools during the Covid-19 lockdown is unbelievable, yet sadly predictable. Read the hard-hitting editorial on nepalitimes.com

**Most commented**



## Drop in wildfires during lockdown

by Jayash Paudel

Nepal saw a drastic drop in forest fires this spring during the Covid-19 lockdown, reducing economic loss and improving air quality. But what happens after the pandemic? Report with before-after remote sensing data.

**Most popular on Twitter**

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## Erika and King Tribhuvan

by Alisha Sijapati

Look back 70 years ago to the role of a German physiotherapist and her friendship with King Tribhuvan in Nepal's democracy transition in this gripping review of her 1958 book.

## QUOTE TWEETS

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**

Government's unwillingness to address lack of education for 6 million students attending public schools is tantamount to criminal negligence. It's clear #COVID19 is here to stay, and the Education Ministry has finally decided to recognise #RemoteLearning.

**Sonja Rusticus @SonjaRusticus**

Finally an article about school situation. Every child has the right to study. I am worried that many children will drop out. The government should allow remote learning and also re-opening of school in districts where Covid cases are low.

**Chun B. Gurung @Chun\_Gurung**

Wake up call @HelloMoeNepal. Restart remote & in-person classes, & raise the standard of instruction in govt schools.

**KYU\_Yeti @KyuYeti**

This says a lot. Now, please do other ministries also. Thank you. If nothing, at least we will have a more aware public.

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**

It is not just coronavirus that is spreading in the community, but also fear of frontline health workers. They are being ostracised, publicly humiliated & threatened. But there are also communities that have honoured them and are working to reduce stigma.

**Rajen Limbu @rajenlimbu1**

Help them to help you! They need your support as much as you need theirs because they know what they are doing to get you and your loved one better.

# Nepal's tourism now has to re-start from zero

As Covid-19 wrecks the industry, a nostalgic look back at Boris Lissanevitch and his Royal Hotel

**N**ot since the early 1950s have we had zero tourists arrive in Kathmandu Valley.

The combination of hostile geography and cautious politics had effectively conspired to keep foreigners out of the kingdom of Nepal, sealed for centuries. When King Tribhuvan wrested power



**SO FAR SO GOOD**  
Lisa Choegyal

back from the reclusive Rana rulers in 1951, only an estimated total of 300 foreign officials, diplomats and royal guests had ever penetrated the malarial swamps of the Tarai or the snow-bound Himalayan barrier of the northern passes.

The xenophobia of previous regimes considered it prudent to keep the doors closed to Westerners, especially with the changing fortunes of Tibet and China to the north, and a marauding East India Company followed by a power-hungry British Empire lurking along the southern boundary, which extended nearly twice the length of Nepal today.

All trade routes into the Valley were well patrolled, and the British incumbents at their Lainchaur Residency (now the Indian Ambassador's home) were tolerated to varying degrees, but remained under escort even around the Valley and seldom permitted beyond its rim except to their ridgeline cottage at Koulia, then Kakani.

Boris Lissanevitch changed all that when he opened Kathmandu's first hotel and brought the first tourist group to Nepal in 1955. Having visited on a 10-day holiday in 1951 at the invitation of newly instated King Tribhuvan, Boris moved to Kathmandu with Inger, two small boys, Mischa and Alexander (their third son Nicholas was born later in Nepal), and a mother-in-law with a penchant for collecting stray animals and antiques.

'After a few hours I fell madly in love with this country' Boris declared in a contemporary interview. 'This is where we wanted to live.' Inger, his beautiful Danish Scottish wife, 23 years junior, agreed. They never left.

An ebullient White Russian ballet dancer and big-game hunter born in Odessa of Ukraine, Boris was a larger than life character, born into a wealthy military Tsarist family amidst the hardships of the 1905 Russian revolution. A cadet heading for a career in the Tsar's navy, instead Boris had to flee to France, escaping Bolshevik persecution.

Boris' exotic career included performing with Diaghilev's Ballet Russes in Paris and dancing with Massine throughout Europe, South America and Asia. In 1936, finding himself stranded in India, he started the exclusive 300 Club in Calcutta, the first establishment to accept Indian members and to remain open 24 hours a day. Patronised by India's princely elite, leading businessmen, world war pilots, diplomats and itinerant adventurers, Boris had the opportunity to meet and charm royalty and influential politicians from the region, especially Nepal.

In addition to King Tribhuvan, his close friends and frequent guests during his ten years at the 300 Club included the Maharaja of Cooch Behar and exiled Nepali Rana militants, Mahavir and Subarna Shamsher. Supposedly B P Koirala, Nepal's democracy activist, and King Tribhuvan held secret negotiations in the men's room.



Boris Lissanevitch and Inger at Kathmandu airport in 1955 when the first tour groups started arriving in Nepal.

Not all the abundant stories about Boris' exploits are true, but they are usually dramatic and always amusing – he was a collector of people and tall tales.

Boris set up a spirit distillery in Kathmandu, and with Prince Basundhara converted Bahadur Bhawan in Kantipath (now the Election Commission offices) into the Royal Hotel with 40 restored rooms. In its 1960s heyday, the Royal was considered amongst the most interesting hotels in the world, and its charismatic proprietor was a major attraction. The hotel's Yak & Yeti Bar was the heart of Kathmandu's foreign community with Boris presiding, ever popular with a stream of mountaineers, envoys, explorers, spies, missionaries, aid workers, tiger hunters, yeti enthusiasts – and tourists.

As Toni Hagen remembered, the Royal Hotel was 'an irresistible gathering point', eating, drinking and storytelling would go on late into the night, until 'Boris began to sing Russian folk songs in his deep voice or even perform Russian dances'. Featuring his flamboyant brand of personal charisma, warm hospitality and fine Russian recipes, Boris was the first to bring 'ordinary' tourists to Nepal and is thus credited with being the 'father of Nepal tourism'.

Guests unable to pay the Royal room rate, pitched tents in the hotel's spacious grounds, avoiding the bizarre vegetables that Boris introduced – he was the first to cultivate mushrooms, strawberries, artichokes, carrots and beetroots – and a roaming menagerie of stray animals. Lhasa Apso dogs, flying squirrels, leopard cats, and a mare that would come 'clattering down the veranda to be fed lumps of sugar', occasionally wandering into guest bedrooms leaving unwelcome offerings. A red panda named Pandaji, a gift from Ed Hillary, was said to be the most photographed animal in Nepal.

In 1964 screen idol Jean Paul Belmondo, with a crew led by director Philippe de Broca stayed at the Royal for a few weeks to make Nepal's first feature film, a boisterous comedy released as *Up to His Ears*. Boris played a small part. In a scene Belmondo asks: 'How come you speak such good French?' and he replies: 'Because I am Russian!' After filming in Kathmandu and Pokhara, the



Boris was always kind to me, the new girl in town. I was asked to arrange his 75th birthday party and Desmond Doig (pointing) designed the layered chocolate birthday cake 'From Ballet to Belly' on 4 Oct 1980. Boris is seated, and incongruously, I am holding a flashlight, no doubt a comment on the electricity supply of the times.



Boris and Inger with Pandaji, the resident red panda at the Royal Hotel.

BORIS OF KATHMANDU/INSTAGRAM

crew went to Hong Kong where Belmondo met Ursula Andress, leaving his wife in a much-publicised love affair.

Boris' special entertainment skills were required by his royal connections to cater extravagant parties and banquets, not least Mahendra's coronation ceremony in 1956 and the hunting camp for Queen Elizabeth and the Duke of Edinburgh's state visit in 1961. Boris himself was fictionalised by the novelist Han Suyin in *The Mountain is Young* (1958), and his eventful life is described in *Tiger for Breakfast* (1966) by Michel Peissel.

With Boris' word-of-mouth and media networks paving the way, tourism flourished during the 1960s. Nepali entrepreneurs and royal family members were quick to grasp its potential, opening new hotels of their own. The hordes of hippies, mountaineers and world travellers began to arrive, but preferred to hang out in Basantapur. In 1969 the Royal Hotel was forced to close.

By the time I came to Nepal in 1974, myths about the famous Royal's chaotic hospitality were lost in the building's abandoned arches, its dusty corridors echoing with the footsteps of former guests

Menu	Rs.
Pate of Liver	25
Ukrainian Borscht	25
Quail Eggs Roberts	30
Smoked Beets	65
Tenderloin with Mushroom Gravy	60
Shashlik with Persian Cee	60
Pork Schnitzel Holstein	55
Stroganoff	60
Guinea Fowl Marechal	65
Chicken Kiev with Bortha	60
Boris' Omlette	35
Club sandwich Special	50
Fresh Mixed Salad	15
Yeti Delight	25
Turkish Souffle with Lemon	20
Ice Cream with Foblin	20
Coffee or Tea	6
130 Government Beer	00
130 Government Beer	00

A rather tattered menu survives from the Yak & Yeti Restaurant in Lal Durbar which Boris opened in 1970.

Hollywood stars Vivien Leigh and Ingrid Bergman, Baron Thyssen from Switzerland, Jean Paul Guerlain seeking ingredients for his perfumes, and Queen Sophia of Spain on her honeymoon.

My boss Jim Edwards greatly admired Boris and helped him through many lean times as he struggled with a series of restaurants in Kathmandu, always strong on entertaining but light on commercial acumen. As I sat behind my blue painted desk in the Tiger Tops office, Boris would shuffle past in a gaudy short-sleeved shirt with a cheery wave, on his way to beg another loan from the soft-hearted Jim.

'He was a terrible businessman, he didn't think about money at all,' bemoaned Inger. Boris himself said: 'I always spent just about a little bit more than I made'. Disasters over the years included trout, pig and vegetable farming, peach wine, and the failed mahua flower liquor business, which landed him in prison for a couple of months for non-payment of royalties.

Restaurants came and went, located in Dilli Bazar, Darbar Marg and his Yak & Yeti Restaurant in Lal Durbar which had opened in 1970 (now the Chimney Restaurant in the Yak & Yeti Hotel). I was first taken there for my birthday in 1974, and my future husband Tenzin and I had our first date, crammed on the narrow window seats around the circular brass fireplace. I was mesmerised by the sophisticated choice of flavoured vodkas – lemon, pepper, and something green and not very nice, dill perhaps. The elaborate 1970s menu featured not only Russian favourites such as borscht and stroganoff, but snipe pate, guinea fowl marechale, smoked beets and quail's eggs provided by Jimmy Roberts.

And who were Nepal's first tourists? In 1955 Boris persuaded the reluctant King Mahendra, newly succeeded to the throne on the death of his father Tribhuvan, to invite the first tour group arranged with Thomas Cook & Sons in Calcutta. Consisting of 'mostly old ladies from a cruise ship', the narrative goes that the King was so impressed by their genuine enthusiasm for his country, delighted by Kathmandu culture and hoovering up handicrafts in the Royal Hotel shop, that he was convinced by Boris to embrace tourism for his emerging nation, ordering officials to arrange two-week tourist visas.

Since that day when Boris achieved this historic reversal and Nepal began to tentatively welcome visitors, tourism has become an essential core industry with consistent growth, climbing from none in 1951, to 6,000 arrivals in 1962 and 1.2 million last year – until coronavirus hit.

# Politician educates herself at age 43

To set an example, member of provincial assembly Chun Kumari Chaudhari graduates from school

Unnati Chaudhary in Kailali

**F**or an illiterate woman from a destitute family of former bonded labourers, Chun Kumari Chaudhari could not have been more removed from the power centres of Nepali politics.

She comes from a family of kamaiya in western Nepal, who till 20 years ago used to be bonded to landlords through a hereditary system of indentured labour. Chun Kumari spent her childhood working in her landlord's house as a semi-slave *kamlari*, and at 15 was married off. She never went to school, and in her husband's home she was too weighed down with household chores to learn to read and write.

But earlier this month, at the age of 43, Chun Kumari got word that she had passed her SEE high school examination with a GPA of 2.25. She now plans to juggle her law-making duties at the provincial legislature by enrolling in political science at college.

"There is a lot of work still left to do in our country," says Chun Kumari, "nothing can stop me now."

It is this extraordinary confidence and unfailing grit that has brought Chun Kumari so far. She started out as a member of a local community forest user group in Kailali, and rose up the ranks to become a member of the Far-Western Provincial Assembly. She then educated herself, and is determined to fight socio-economic disparity and societal oppression.

"Because of my poverty and society's restrictions on females, I never got to go to



school," she recalls. "Later on, I was often humiliated because of my illiteracy."

In 2018, when she became a member of the Far-Western Provincial Assembly, she had to face much ridicule from party co-workers for being illiterate. Chun Kumari says: "I decided then and there to turn my shame into determination and found the courage to join a school."

So in 2018, inspired by another former *kamlari* Shanta Chaudhary who was elected to the Constituent Assembly seven years ago,

**SHEER DETERMINATION:** Chun Kumari Chaudari, 43, giving her school exam in Kailali last year (left).

The former *kamlari* educated herself after becoming a member of the Far-Western Provincial Assembly 2017 after she became a member of the provincial legislature (below).

Chun Kumari joined Grade 8 of Bhageswor School.

She did not tell her husband or children, thinking they would not approve. A week after her classes started her husband found out, but luckily he was supportive.

In class, Chun Kumari was aware of her age difference with other students. "It was incredibly uncomfortable at first. I couldn't even bring myself to get up and use the washroom. I became ill because of the stress. But slowly, I made friends among my classmates who were much younger than even my own children," she says.

Chun Kumari's son Dipak is 25, has graduated in science from college, and is now working at the Shuklaphanta National Park.

Chun Kumari Chaudhari's political life began in 1994, much before she taught herself to read and write. She started out as a member of the local community forest user's group and worked her way up to be secretary and chair. She then was elected vice president of the Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN).

She was affiliated with the UML party, and in 2017 was elected to be a member of the provincial assembly. She says, "My role now is to change society, so that girls are not discriminated against, have better opportunities, and do not have to go through what I did."

# How a rural radio thrived during lockdown

When most media are on the verge of collapse, a woman-led radio station finds a successful business model

Laxmi Basnet in Kapilvastu

**S**ona Khatik (pictured, right) was still studying in Grade 12 when she found her calling in life: to be a radio broadcaster. She ran a Tharu language program that was not just a hobby, she needed the income to support her family.

Soon, Khatik's voice became a familiar sound in many households in this Tarai district. Even as an intern, she reported on farming with news people could use.

Since then, she has juggled her passion for radio with college, graduating in journalism. Khatik then worked her way up the ranks, and is now Station Manager at Kapilvastu Community Radio.

It has not been easy for Sona Khatik: she is a woman, she is from a Dalit family with few means. But she believes that it was precisely these attributes that made her so determined to succeed.

As the whole country went into an economic standstill with the Covid-19 lockdown six months ago, life became even more difficult. Some radio stations were forced to close, but Kapilvastu Community Radio has not just survived, it is now earning even higher revenue than before the lockdown.

Kapilvastu became a Covid-19 hotspot because of its proximity to the Indian border. Businesses shut, advertising revenue fell, and it was difficult to pay out staff salaries.

As a member of the Association of Community Radio Broadcasters Nepal (ACORAB), Khatik attended many zoom meetings in which other radio station managers talked about being forced to make cost cuts, lay off staff, and reduce air time.

"I was really worried. How was



a small station like ours going to survive," Khatik recalls thinking. "I decided we could not let our community down."

As station manager, she was honest with her staff: they would have to work without salaries if the radio commercials stopped coming in. They were willing to work for six months without pay if necessary. "We would rather support the community than just stay at home doing nothing," they told her.

The lockdown has been a boon. The station has gained new advertisers, created more programs, and expanded to a new audience of young listeners.

Within the first month of the lockdown, the radio had produced many jingles in four languages (Nepali, Tharu, Bhojpuri and Awadhi) for coronavirus awareness. They were so effective, the station got sponsors from local non-profits and even private companies.

"It was overwhelming, and quite unexpected," Khatik says. "I started to reach out to other sponsors, and not a single one of them declined."

Kapilvastu Community Radio decided to make its public service remit its unique selling point during the pandemic.

With the added income, Khatik could regularly pay salary to staff, and also get them to add new segments and radio packages to the daily broadcast. Listeners were all cooped up at home, and they welcomed the new infotainment programs in multiple languages, and listenership grew. This meant that even more advertisers were interested to buy transmission slots.

Says Khatik: "There is this wrong notion in Nepali society that women cannot and are not capable of taking leadership positions. We have proven them wrong," says Khatik proudly.

Indeed, many other media



**RADIO ACTIVE:** Sona Khatik in the studio of Kapilvastu Community Radio where she is Station Manager. She broke her leg while riding her bicycle to her studio last week.

Sona Khatik rose up the ranks from being a cub reporter to Station Manager in 12 years.

announcement from the police. I had not declared the lockdown myself," smiles Khatik.

The radio team which was willing to forego half a year's salary was now getting paid in full, so staff decided to contribute to a fund to help free feeding programs for the poorest families in the neighbourhood.

We asked Khatik why she thinks her station has thrived when other media in Nepal are struggling. She replies: "I think it is because we engage with our community, we go out into the field and record people's voices and do not bring politicians to the studio. And I think it is also because they know it is a station run by a woman."

It has been so hectic, that last week while bicycling back and forth from home to the studio, Khatik slipped and fractured her leg. There was no way she was going to be home-bound, so she uses crutches to get to the station and back.

With a chair supporting her plastered leg, Sona Khatik reminisces about the old days: "I cannot believe that it has been 12 years since I started out as an intern. Now here I am. I am reminded of how important it is to listen to your employees, no matter what their position. A good leader values every member, and recognises the importance of team work. It is more than luck that makes a company successful, especially during a crisis."

**prabhu bank BIZ BRIEFS**

### Demand for more flights

As per the government's directive to increase the number of arriving passengers to 800 per day, more Nepalis have started arriving on scheduled and chartered repatriation flights. However, travel industry sources say the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN) has not spaced out the arriving flights properly, and the airport is crowded when flights arrive at the same time making it impossible to maintain social distancing. They also say that far more flights can be accommodated if they are staggered through the day and night so as to clear the huge backlog of stranded Nepalis for repatriation.

Unclear guidelines and haphazard management at the airport means that even passengers arriving with PCR negative reports have to spend six hours after arrival in holding centres.

Ten international airlines are conducting more than 100 scheduled flights in September, with another 54 chartered flights mainly from the Gulf. Although Indian civil aviation sources say they are ready to fly from Mumbai, Delhi and Kolkata to Kathmandu, permission has not been forthcoming from the Nepal government. There are many Nepalis stranded in India and Indians in Nepal who want to fly back to their home countries.

Nepal's other carrier, Himalaya Airlines, has said it will operate scheduled flights to Chongqing, Kuala Lumpur and Abu Dhabi.

### Ncell

Ncell launched its 'Pahilo SIM' campaign on 3 September, for which 2020 SEE graduates can subscribe to a prepaid SIM

card for just Rs1. The SIM will be available from Ncell Centres, where students will be required to present a valid SEE admit card, passport sized photo and their citizenship card. Ncell has also launched new offers under its Plus campaign that will allow its 4G customers to enjoy nonstop access to YouTube, TikTok and Facebook.

### NIC Asia

NIC Asia has handed over the 'Bright School System' software to 19 public schools in Sunwal Municipality, Butwal, and Ribdikot Rural Municipality in Province 5 in order to make education tech-friendly. The software will help the schools with attendance, payment services, parental approval forms, smart classes, exam report cards, fee lists, public holidays, assignments, exam schedules, classroom timetables, and more. The 4th Annual General Meeting of NIC Asia Capital on 3 September passed a resolution to distribute a cash dividend of Rs. 36 million at the rate of 18 percent of the paid-up capital as proposed by the Board of Directors.



### Samsung Galaxy Note20

Samsung has launched its flagship Galaxy Note20 and Galaxy Note20 Ultra. The latest Note series includes a more precise S Pen, more flexible Samsung Notes App experience, adaptive 120Hz display, and an ultra-high resolution 8K camera. The Galaxy Note20 and the Galaxy Note20 Ultra are priced

at Rs109,999 and Rs139,999 respectively, and will be available across Samsung brand shops and retail stores across Nepal.

### Muktinath Bank

Muktinath Bikas Bank has entered into an agreement with health institutions Kathmandu Naturopathy Hospital, Vision Concern, Doctor on Call, Surya Healthcare, and the Central Diagnostic Laboratory (CDL) to provide discounts at various rates on check-ups, PCR tests, and other health procedures to its Visa debit card holders and mobile banking users.



### Pamacare handwash

Cosmetic company Pamacare has launched its new line of hand-wash which includes 3 flavours: Lavender and Water Lily, Lemon and Mandarin, as well as Tea Tree and Apple. The hand-wash will be available in 250ml bottles at Rs152.

### Reliance shares

Reliance Life Insurance has listed 6.3 million shares sold to the public at Rs 100 per unit with the Nepal Stock Exchange. The shares were initially issued from 20-24 August and distributed to the public on 28 August. The company has appointed Sunrise Capital Limited as the Share Registrar to keep records of securities trading, keep track of stock cancellations, transfer shares, and keep up to date with shareholders' data.



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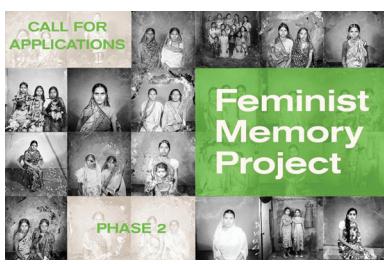
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## VIRTUAL EVENTS



### Feminist Memory Project

Photo Circle is calling for applications for 10 Archival Research Fellowship positions for the second phase of the Feminist Memory Project. Applicants must be based outside Kathmandu Valley and be able to produce, record and create oral histories, as well as collect documents and photographs from their locale to add to the feminist archive. COVID-19 safety guidelines apply. All research fellows will be provided with COVID-19 insurance coverage. More details: <https://www.nepalpicturelibrary.org/update/feminist-memory-project>. Application deadline: 12 September

### Writing Wednesday

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

### Game On

Join Book Bus Nepal this month for a series of exciting readings and discussions on the world of gaming. Head to Book Bus Nepal's Facebook page for more details. Sign up for Nepal Reads: Game On! here: <https://forms.gle/kaz6jwZfDR1SHWZZA> 8-30 September



### Project Involve 2021

Film Independent is accepting applications from aspiring filmmakers for Project Involve 2021, which pairs participants with mentors at the top of their respective field, provides hands-on filmmaking experience from pre-production through premiere and much more. Apply at <https://www.filmindependent.org/programs/applications/>. Application deadline: 14 September

### Private yoga sessions

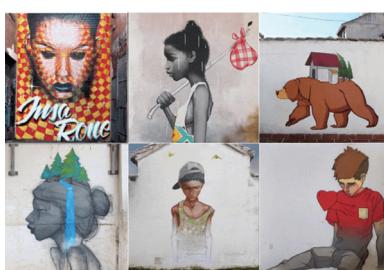
Soorya Wellness and Yoga centre has made private yoga sessions available to everyone for self practice at home. Sessions are available on prior appointment. Go to the Soorya Wellness Facebook page for details. Fee: Rs3000, 9818481972



### Toastmasters Invictus

International's Invictus is a video contest in which participants record a video of a self-prepared speech based on the theme 'Resilience'. The contest will be accompanied by a series of workshops and resources endorsed internationally in the field of communication and leadership. 1-28 September

## ONLINE ARCHIVES



### Virtual street art

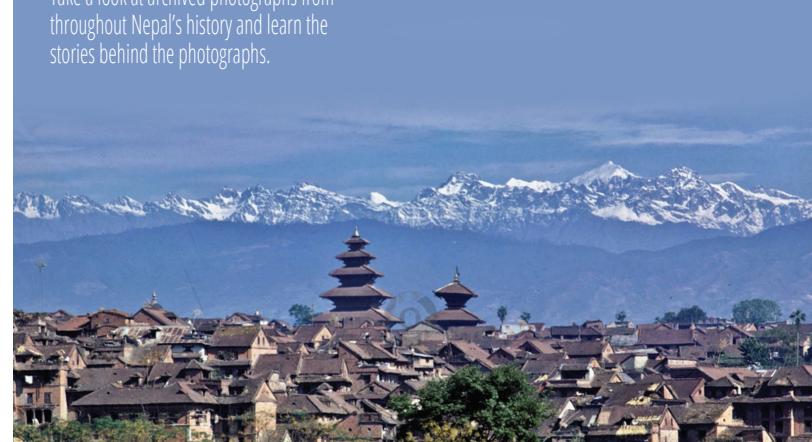
Google Arts Project: Street Art showcases the world's greatest graffiti works and tells the stories behind them, including those of Nepal. Viewers can take virtual walking tours, view online exhibitions and learn about the artists themselves.

### Forest 404

Forest 404 is a nine-part environmental thriller podcast set 200 years into the future where forests do not exist anymore. Each episode is followed by an expert discussing the theme of the episode. Find on Apple podcasts, Spotify, and Google podcasts.

### Photo Museum Nepal

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



### Comic Library

Find a variety of comic books available from the British Council Digital Library, including comics such as Star Wars, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Disney classics. Visit [bit.ly/2XB7Vbl](http://bit.ly/2XB7Vbl) to find out more.



### TED-Ed

Educators, parents, and students: find hundreds of animated lessons on topics ranging from visual arts to mathematics on TED-Ed. Go to the website for details, or go directly to TED-Ed's YouTube channel and start watching.

## QUARANTINE DINING



### Bungalow Bar and Kitchen

Enjoy authentic Thai dishes like Som Tam Thai, Pad Kra Pao and Pad Thai or asian - fusion dishes like the Buff LemonGrass and Chicken Satay. Find the menu on Facebook. 9801068630 / 9840660928



### Fire and Ice

Fire and Ice offers genuine Napoletana pizza and dozens of variants to choose from. Try the paesana, a combination of mozzarella, spinach, courgette and bacon, and the Spaghetti Pomodoro with homemade tomato sauce. Find more on Foodmandu. (01)5350210



### Haadi Biryani

Craving a quick and easy Biryani? Haadi is the place to order from. Enjoy slow-cooked biryani seasoned with a secret spice blend that enhances the dining experience. Head to Facebook for details. 4438444 / 9864334987



### Belgian Waffles

Get mouthwatering waffles delivered to your doorstep from the Belgian Waffles Co. Call for details, or order through Facebook. Delivery: 12pm -6pm, 9843108194

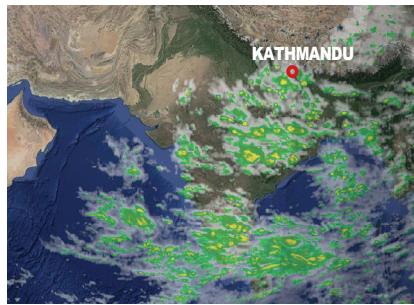


### Sweet Fix

Keep hot, humid afternoons at bay with healthy handcrafted popsicles. Get the Coconut Splash, Mint Kiwi, and Blackberry Yogurt pops. Head to Facebook for details or order from the Sweet Fix website. 9828583465

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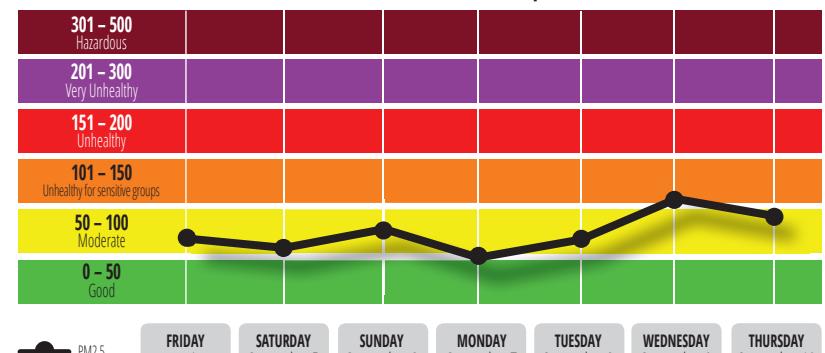


We are now at the tail-end of the monsoon, but the trend for the past decade has been that the rains have continued till October. For the moment, the precipitation has eased off a bit, but it will pick up on Friday and into the weekend -- especially in central Nepal near Pokhara. Kathmandu Valley will be cloudy, with some showers towards evening and night.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
18°	28°	19°
PM2.5	PM2.5	PM2.5

## AIR QUALITY INDEX

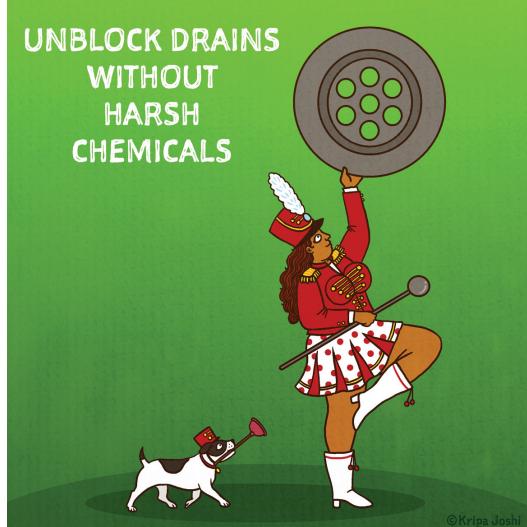
KATHMANDU, 4 - 10 Sept



We have now entered the Smart Lockdown phase with odd-even rule for vehicles and partial opening of businesses, allowing people mobility. Unfortunately this is already visible in the Air Quality Index on Thursday morning, which has worsened from 'Good' (Green) to 'Moderate' (Yellow). With the rains tapering off, this will increase the concentration of pollutants in Kathmandu's city centre. In fact, the daily average AQI throughout last week was mostly in the yellow 'Moderate' zone. It had been mostly green for most of last week. <https://np.usembassy.gov/embassy/air-quality-monitor/>

## ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI

KRIPA JOSHI



Harsh cleaners used to unblock drains can release hazardous fumes and chemicals. The main ingredient in most conventional drain cleaners is sodium hydroxide, also known as caustic soda which can aggravate respiratory airways. Instead we can first use inexpensive and non-toxic methods with ingredients from the kitchen cabinet. A plunger, straightened wire hanger or a drain cleaning brush are the most eco-friendly options to unblock drains. For fat, oil, and grease clog, a good squirt of dishwashing soap followed by boiling water is an effective method. Another option is to pour half a cup of baking soda and half a cup of vinegar followed by hot water once the fizzing stops. When using these methods, it is still important to take precautions and to wear gloves. To prevent clogged drains we should avoid disposing fats, oil and grease down the drain and use drain covers to catch food and hair from our sinks and showers. #FridaysForFuture



## OUR PICK

A leader of minority party Birgitte Nyborg becomes the first female prime minister of her country in a shocking turn of events in this highly acclaimed Danish political drama *Borgen*. In three-season, 30 episodes, the series brilliantly portrays the personal cost of power and explores the close ties between media and politics. Actors Sidse Babett Knudsen, Birgitte Hjort Sørensen and Pilou Asbæk give some of their best performances.

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

फोन: नं. १०९८ मा खबर गरौ।

नेपाल सरकार  
सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय  
सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग

# Nepal, China re-measure height of Mt Everest

Two countries preparing to announce the new elevation of the world's highest mountain

Sonia Awale

If it was not for the Covid-19 pandemic, we would by now have found out the result of the latest measurement of the world's highest mountain.

Yes, 8,848m (29,028ft) is widely accepted as the height of Mt Everest since 1955, even though the elevation of the summit has fluctuated by a dozen or so metres since then, depending on who is doing the calculating.

Since previous measurements were by American, European or Indian surveyors, it has become a matter of national pride for Nepal and China to come up with their own height for the peak that lies on their Himalayan border.

The height of Mt Everest has changed with advances in survey technology. The Great Trigonometric Survey Of India in 1856 declared Mt Everest the highest mountain in the world at exactly 29,000ft. But since surveyors thought no one would believe such a round figure, they added 2ft to it so it sounded more precise. But it was surprisingly accurate for the time.

There are also many different ways to calculate Everest's elevation: from mean sea level, from the lowest depth of the ocean, or even the distance from the centre of the Earth to the summit, which would mean that some Andean peaks would actually be 'taller' because the planet is not perfectly round but has a slight bulge along its equator.

Then there is the question of whether the true height is the bedrock at the summit, or should the 4m thick icing on the top of Everest also be added? The height is also not static – the peak is undergoing tectonic uplift of about 1cm a year, and the ice cover on the summit varies in thickness because of precipitation, wind and (of late) global warming.

More recently, geologists and scientists have also come up with different figures for the impact of the 2015 earthquake – most agree that Mt Everest may have shrunk by about 3cm, and been displaced southwards by a metre or more.

"The height of Everest is constantly changing due to tectonic activity, of which the 2015 Gorkha Earthquake is only the most recent contribution," explains Christopher Pearson of the University of Otago in New Zealand who worked with Nepali surveyors on the measurement in 2018. "Since the present measurements are fairly old, we needed to update it."

The New Zealand government assisted Nepal's Survey Department to install GPS equipment on the summit and train technicians in processing the GPS data, geodesy, levelling and gravity measurements.

Says Navin Manandhar, formerly with the Geodetic Branch of the Survey Department who helped develop the methodology for re-measurement: "This body of work is a matter of pride for Nepal, but is also a huge undertaking and with the whole world keenly waiting for the result, it has not been easy."

Indeed, Survey Department officials are tight-lipped about the final height, and will not even give a hint about whether Mt Everest is taller or shorter. The reason for the sensitivity is that the governments of China and Nepal have signed an MoU to cooperate in the re-measurement and agreed during President Xi Jinping's state visit to Kathmandu last October to

**TOP GONE:** Karma Tenzing's photo from May 2019 of the summit of Mt Everest. The 2015 earthquake brought down the Hillary Step half-way up the ridge.



KARMA TENZING



Gravity Survey and trigonometry map of the Everest region (right)

DEPARTMENT OF SURVEY NEPAL

announce the result jointly.

Even if the new height of Mt Everest is found to be lower, there is no danger of it being demoted as the highest mountain in the world. The second highest peak, Mr K2 in Pakistan, is 'only' 8,611m.

Nepal's own survey team led by Khim Lal Gautam climbed the mountain on 22 May 2019, and installed GPS equipment and ground-penetrating radar on the peak. The team risked its life, and Gautam lost a toe to frostbite.

A Chinese survey team finally climbed Mt Everest from the north in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic on 28 May, and left its own equipment on top. This allowed measurements with China's BeiDou satellite navigation system, as well as a series of overflights

above Mt Everest in June by an aircraft installed with precision gravity survey equipment.

There is now concern about what happens if there is discrepancy between the Chinese and Nepali calculations of the height. But experts interviewed for this report said the two elevations would be "close" even though China used the Yellow Sea as a reference for sea-level, and Nepal chose a point much closer on the Bay of Bengal coast.

Says Pearson: "I expect the program will come up with by far the most accurate sea level height for Sagarmatha since Nepal has used cutting edge features in its survey. This work has also led to better models of geoid systems which will make it easier to measure the exact heights of other mountains in Nepal

using modern GPS techniques."

Nepal's Survey Department deployed both traditional methods (trigonometry levelling as done by Survey of India in 1950s) with precise levelling and more accurate modern geoid system with gravity survey, and Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) to cross check the results.

For precise levelling, the surveyors measured altitudes of 12 points from sea level right up to the base of the mountain. For this, surveyors had to use six Indian trigonometrical points from the sea to the Nepal border.

The ground penetrating radar that the Survey Department team left on the summit of Mt Everest last May measures the ice cap at the summit and monitors its thickness.

## How high is high?

The modern history of Mt Everest is replete with debate about its true height. The Great Trigonometric Survey (GTS) of India in 1856 declared the mountain the highest in the world at 8,840m – and named the peak after Sir George Everest, its chief in 1965.

In 1955, the Survey of India revised the height as 8,848m, and this was reconfirmed by China (8,848.13m) in 1975. But in 1999, a US survey using GPS and radar technology declared its height to be 8,850m.

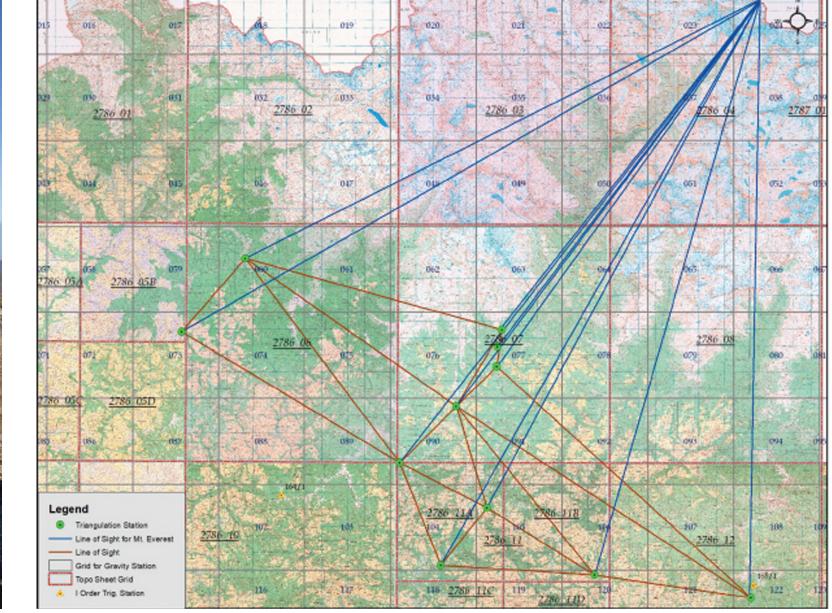
In 2005, a Chinese expedition remeasured Everest's rock height and claimed it to be four meters lower at 8,844.43m, giving rise to long-standing debate on what should be the official height. China and Nepal then agreed they would use both figures.

The problem with taking the ice cap as the summit height is that its thickness varies from year to year, whereas the rock summit is more permanent.

### Everest measurement timeline

1856	: 8,840 or 29,002 ft declared the highest as peak XV (the exact height measured was actually 29,000ft which is 8,839.2m) (Survey of India)
1880-83, 1903	: 8,882 or 29,141ft (Survey of India)
1955	: 8,848m or 29,028ft (Survey of India)
1975	: China confirmed
1987	: Italy, 8,872m (29,208ft)
1992	: Italy, 8,846 (29,023ft) rock height
1999	: US, 8,850m (29,035ft)
2005	: China, 8,844.43m (29,017.16ft), rock height
2020	: Nepal, China—announcement delayed by Covid-19 pandemic

Gravity Station and Trig. Network for Mt. Everest



DEPARTMENT OF SURVEY NEPAL

This can be used to calculate the rock height of the summit.

Nepal's surveyors have completed their calculations, and now face an even more tricky task of keeping that number a secret until the Chinese complete their calculations, and a joint announcement is made.

Even though the two countries share the mountain with the north, west and east face in China and the south face in Nepal, Mt Everest (Sagarmatha or Chomolungma) is an emotive issue in the country.

"It will be unfortunate if this purely scientific exercise is overshadowed by politics," says Manandhar. "This exercise goes beyond Everest. The knowledge and experience we gained will be crucial in future survey work."

# Inside story of Nepal's Rana dynasty

Lockdown is a good time to catch up with two books on the Ranas written by Ranas

Kunda Dixit

**W**hen Sagar Rana launched his book, *Singha Durbar: Rise and Fall of the Rana Regime of Nepal* three years ago, I asked him what made him and his two brothers Bharat and Jadgish so liberal-minded compared to other members of his clan that ruled Nepal for over a century.

He said it was because he and his brothers grew up within the comforts and luxury of a Rana palace, and they were keenly aware of the poverty and social injustice in Nepali society.

I said, wait a minute, there were other Ranas of that era who also grew up in luxury and saw the country's pervasive poverty first hand. What made him and his brothers different? Sagar Rana thought that over, and said it was probably his father's emphasis on education. Indeed, Mrigendra Shumsher was Education Minister under the Ranas and the family lived under strict discipline and in a relatively frugal lifestyle.

At age 12 in 1951, Sagar was sent to boarding school in Indore followed by five years in Leighton Park School in Reading in England, where he did his A Level and went on to Oxford for a Masters in Law.

He returned to Nepal during the tumultuous years after the royal coup of 1961 that put Nepali Congress leaders, including his brother Bharat in jail. On return to Nepal, Sagar Rana became a member of the Nepali Congress during the years it was banned. There were few other Ranas who took the risk. He was detained several times, his house was often searched, and his family's Baber Mahal property was confiscated. He suffered the social boycott of the ruling elite, including relatives.

Sagar Rana was also a member of the Congress Working Committee and Head of the Department of International Relations during the crucial years leading to and during the 12-point agreement with the Maoists of November 2005.

There was perhaps no one better placed to pen the history of the rise and fall of the Ranas than Sagar Rana. He was a family insider and political outsider during the great changes after 1950, the



great grandson of Prime Minister Chandra Shumsher, grandson of hardliner Gen Baber Shumsher, son of educationist Mrigendra Shumsher. His son, Udaya, is the Nepali Congress MP from Lalitpur.

It is this inter-generational involvement of a Rana family in Nepal's political transition that makes *Singha Durbar* such a compelling and credible account of the clan's rule from 1847-1951.

Sagar Rana has delved into archival material, memoirs in Nepali written by historical figures, interviews with members of the extended family, and an unpublished diary of his father. The book is academic in scope and flows well from one Rana prime minister to the next.

It begins with the intrigue and ambition that led to the events at the Hanuman Dhoka Palace in 1847. The bloodshed led to the rise of Jung Bahadur Kunwar – the ancestor of all the Ranas to follow.

Jung Bahadur rose to pre-eminence because the Shahs bickered, and the courtier families of the Pandes, Thapas and Basnyats carried on their feuds. Although the Kot massacre was gory, Sagar Rana reminds us that it was not as bloody as Bhimsen Thapa's purge 30 years previously, after Nepal's defeat in the war with the East India Company, in which more than a hundred members of the nobility were culled.

Jung Bahadur has earned a well-deserved reputation for being ruthless, but he was also a strategic thinker and had the survival of the recently emasculated Gorkha Empire foremost in mind. This is why he made a trip to England in 1850 – an elaborate espionage mission to gauge Britain's military might and to see if it was wise to risk going to war with the Empire to regain territory lost in 1816.



Surendra Bir Bikram Shah 1847-1881

1847

Rajendra Bir Bikram Shah 1816-1847



Prithvi Bir Bikram Shah 1881-1911

1914-1918

1901

1903

1908

1923

1929

1850

1857

1877

1885

Dhir Shumsher

(1885-1901)

Bir Shumsher

(1885-1901)

Dev Shumsher

(1891-1929)

Chandra Shumsher

(1901-1929)

Chandra visits

UK

Chandra lobbies

successfully to

sign Anglo-Nepal

Friendship Treaty

Bhim Shumsher

(1929-1932)

1847

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1914-1918

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1929

Jung Bahadur

Kunwar (1846-

1857) rises to

power after the

Kot Massacre

visits Britain

and France

Jung sends

troops to

rescue British

Time of coups,

counter-coups and

bloody purges,

decline of the

Jungs and rise of

the Shumshers.

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Rare photo of the interim government after 1951: last Rana prime minister Mohan Shumsher, King Tribhuvan and Home Minister B P Koirala.



One of many Rana hunting trips in the Tarai, Juddha Shumsher in the 1930s with trophies.

Rana guards during a visit to Calcutta to deliver a letter to Nehru agreeing to overthrow the Ranas.

- In Patna, B P's group was preparing for a military campaign when he eavesdropped on an Indian Embassy radio transmission from Kathmandu that said King Tribhuvan had sought refuge in the mission. Sagar Rana quotes B P's memoir: 'The matter has now gone out of our hands ... the King is under Indian Embassy control.'

- The 5-point Delhi Compromise of 1950 itself seems to have been a harbinger of the 12-point agreement between the seven political parties and the Maoists in Delhi in November 2006, establishing a tradition whereby every big crisis in Nepal is resolved with Indian mediation.

The Rana legacy still casts a long shadow over Nepal. There are Ranans in public life like Pashupati Shumsher, Gautam Rana and the late Prabhakar Rana who brought out the illustrated coffee table book, *The Ranans of Nepal* in 2002 – still a useful reference tool, elegantly

produced. It documents the life and times of the former rulers of Nepal – their history, culture, lifestyle and even cuisine. And who better to tell, and show, it than these three illustrious Ranans.

The authors have tried not to gloss over the raw ambition, greed, and, yes, lust that drove the power struggles in the extended Rana clan. But the overall impression is still of a somewhat sanitised retrospective of those years. Even the decadence is photogenic.

The history chapters in *The Ranans of Nepal* are a surprisingly objective assessment of the period for an account written by insiders whose direct ancestors are protagonists.

Co-author Prabhakar Rana, was the great-grandson of Judha Shumsher, and actually lived in Singha Darbar until the age of 11. Pashupati Rana, is the grandson of the last Rana prime minister, Mohan Shumsher, and was present as a boy of four at the first coronation of King Gyanendra in 1950. Both contributed chapters on

history, architecture, and lifestyle.

The book begins with the royal rivalries among the Rajput rulers of Udaipur that drove one particular family of courtiers to the Himalaya, fleeing all the way up to Jumla. From there they migrated eastward to Kaski and on to Gorkha. The Kunwars helped King Prithvi Narayan in his conquests, and Bal Narsingh Kunwar was made governor of Jumla.

But in the purges that followed the downfall of Bhimsen Thapa in 1840, Bal Narsingh's son Jung Bahadur emerged as a master manipulator who, through sheer charisma, craftiness and courage, wormed his way upwards taking full advantage of the savage power struggles among the descendants of Prithvi Narayan Shah and their consorts.

Jung Bahadur is at the centre of this swirling tale of back-stabbing, intrigue, conspiracies, alliances, finding himself right in the middle of vicious infighting between a powerful queen and her paramour, the king, and the crown prince. At gunpoint,



Tribhuvan Bir Bikram Shah 1911-1955

Jung is forced to shoot his own uncle, the prime minister, and is then caught up in two massacres at the Kot and at Bhandarkhal. He sends the queen and king into exile, installs the crown prince on the throne and makes himself prime minister.

Thus, at age 29, Jung Bahadur Kunwar launches the Rana century in 1847. Three years later, he became the first Subcontinental royal to visit Britain and France, driven by a desire to bypass the obstructive diktats of Calcutta by dealing directly with London. Once there, he received royal treatment.

One gets the feeling reading these two books about massacres, assassinations and chronic infighting, that contemporary Nepali rulers are just following in the footsteps of their ancestors — maybe they are hardwired to be divisive and selfish.

It was inevitable that when Jung died during a hunting trip in Chitwan in 1877, his brothers immediately started squabbling for power. Jung's brother Dhir, installed Jung's brother Rana Udit Singh as successor, while he manoeuvred to take over. Suspecting a plot, he beheaded two dozen courtiers and managed to carve out a place for himself and his 17 sons in the succession. The clan was thus effectively split between the Jung Ranans and the Shumsher Ranans. By 1885, matters reached a head again and Dhir had his six sons kill their uncle, Rana Udit Singh and remove all the descendants of Jung Bahadur's other brothers from succession.

Rana power transitions were messy affairs, and watching all this from the background was the British regent at Lazimpat. We see how British India tried to influence events in Kathmandu, and this has familiar echoes today. When Bir Shumsher sidelined Jagat Jung and exiled him to India, the British refused for five months to recognise Bir as leader.

Bir Shumsher built Nepal's first hospital as well as the Darbar School, for which he imported teachers from England. He was succeeded by the flashy Dev Shumsher who in turn was replaced by the shrewd and astute Chandra Shumsher, whose 29-year reign was marked by uncharacteristic stability and development. He established Nepal's first college, streamlined administration, built suspension bridges all over the

country, installed Nepal's first hydropower plant in 1911 (from domestic coffers, without foreign aid) and named the light powered by electricity generated by it after himself ('Chandra Jyoti').

He sent architects to Europe and horticulturists to Japan for training. He also built a 1,400-room palace for himself, which ended up being a contribution to the nation — it is now Singha Darbar. On the diplomatic front, Chandra Shumsher managed to convince the British to officially agree to Nepal's independent status and got them to put it in writing in the 1923 Anglo-Nepal Treaty of Friendship.

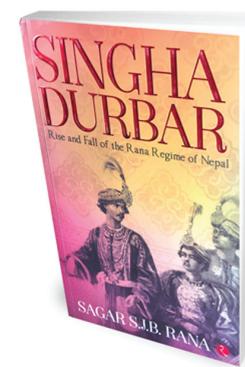
The book also delves into other massacres: that of tigers, rhinos, leopards, crocodiles, bears and pheasants in hunting expeditions in honour of visiting British royalty. There is a dramatic picture of Juddha Shumsher posing in front of pelts of a hundred or so tigers. Good thing many Ranans have now moved away from hunting towards nature conservation.

The rest of the book looks at Rana architecture, and mentions unsung Nepali engineers like Kishore Narsing and the legendary Jogjal Sthapit, known more popularly as Bhajuman.

However incongruous Kathmandu Valley's wedding cake Rana palaces may have looked when they were built, the authors argue that the neo-classical structure 'seem to have achieved their own particular balance with the environment' with their use of local construction material and the incorporation of Nepali features such as courtyards, verandahs, and south-facing balconies.

The chapter on Rana jewellery traces the history of the Rana crown and how it evolved and bulged with gems and diamonds in 104 years (only to be sold to a Parisian jeweller in the mid-1950s). Many of these gems, precious stones and ornaments were spoils from Lucknow after the Mutiny of 1857, or by Indian royalty fleeing Mughal invasions.

The book has more: Rana cuisine, Rana lifestyle, Rana fashion, Rana art, and short biographies of some prominent living Ranans. The book's abridged family tree is still useful to navigate through the book's confusing genealogy, and untangle the complex web of Rana intermarriages with the Shah dynasty.



*Singha Durbar*

Rise and Fall of the Rana Regime of Nepal  
Sagar SJB Rana  
Rupa, New Delhi 2017  
426 pages  
INR 495



*The Ranans of Nepal*

by Prabhakar SJB Rana, Pashupati SJB Rana, Gautam SJB Rana  
First edition Naef Kister S S Editeur, Geneva, 2002  
262 pages, Rs10,000

1932

**Juddha Shumsher**  
(1932-1945)  
Acted swiftly to rebuild after the 1934 earthquake

1945

**Padma Shumsher**  
(1945-1948)  
Tried to introduce reforms as anti-Rana protests spread.

1939  
1945

World War II in which another 25,000 Nepali soldiers are killed in Europe, Burma and Malaya

1947

**Mohan Shumsher**  
(1948-1951) signs Friendship Treaty with India in 1950 to replace British support after 1947. Forced to hand power to King Tribhuvan, and retires to Bangalore in 1951.

1947

National Congress set up in Banaras by K.P. Bhattarai and B.P. Koirala

1946

National Democratic Congress set up in Calcutta by Mahavir Shumsher etc

1949

National Communist Party formed by Pushpa Lal Shrestha in Calcutta

1950  
1951

**King Tribhuvan**  
returns to Kathmandu



JUDDHA (RIGHT) CROWNS PADMA

B.P. KOIRALA AND GANESH MAN SINGH



PUSHPA LAL SHRESTHA, FOUNDER OF COMMUNIST PARTY OF NEPAL





# Nepal's glacial lakes in danger of bursting

47 glacial lakes in Nepal and Tibet are at high risk from global heating

Mukesh Pokhrel

**A** new report out this week warns that hundreds of glacial lakes in the Himalaya are in danger of bursting because global heating is melting the ice on the world's highest mountains. However, on only two of them have there been mitigation measures to reduce water levels.

Those projects have been prohibitively expensive, and questions have been raised about their sustainability and whether they offer a long-term solution.

The water level of the Tso Rolpa glacial lake in the Rolwaling Valley was lowered 20 years ago after scientists warned that it was in imminent danger of bursting. The project cost \$9 million at the time, most of it coming from The Netherlands.

Its sluice gate lowered the water level by only 3m, and scientists now say it needs to go down by a further 20m to reduce risk of it bursting. A network of early warning stations downstream also has not functioned as planned.

The other project was a drainage channel and gate built on Imja Lake in the Mt Everest region in 2016 by the Nepal Army with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) at a cost of \$7.2 million.

The project located at 5,000m altitude was criticised at the time for being an expensive show-case on a popular tourist site near Mt Everest, and for wasting money on a lake that is relatively stable because it is buttressed by two side moraines of the Lhotse Nup and Nuptse Glaciers. Glacial lakes like Thulagi in Lamjung on the Hongu basin were said to be in much greater danger of bursting, and needed more urgent mitigation.

And it has emerged that four years after the project was completed and the water in Imja



Tso Rolpa glacial lake at 4,580m has grown seven times in size in the past 60 years due to global heating.

Lake lowered by 3.4m, the Nepal Army and its main contractor have yet to remove their excavators and other equipment from the site as per the contract — flouting guidelines of Sagarmatha National Park, which is a World Heritage Site.

Despite recent interventions by UNESCO and the national park, the Nepal Army has said it is technically not possible to take the equipment out because of altitude restrictions on its helicopters. The firm hired by the army, Krishna Construction, says its contract does not say anything about removal of equipment.

The Glacial Lake Inventory report launched at a webinar on Monday says that of the expanding glacial lakes in the Himalaya, 47 on the watersheds of Nepal's three main rivers are at high risk of bursting, and causing catastrophic floods downstream. Of these, 42 lakes are on the Kosi River basin in eastern Nepal, three are on the Gandaki and two on the Karnali watersheds.

However, not all the lakes are located in Nepal. Of the 47

## The Top 20

Of the 47 lakes described in a report this week as being in danger of bursting, these are the 20 most at risk due to global heating. Many are so new, they do not even have names.

dangerous lakes, 25 are in Tibet and empty into rivers that flow down directly into Nepal. One of the high risk lakes is in Indian territory on the Karnali.

The report by the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and UNDP mapped 3,624 glacial lakes in the three river basins in Nepal, China and India, of which 2,070 are within Nepal's boundaries. The other 1,509 are on the Tibetan Plateau in China and 45 are in India, but drain into Nepal.

The researchers evaluated the risk factors for the glacial lakes

depending on the integrity of their moraine dams, topography of the surroundings and the risk of avalanche into the lakes, as well as downstream settlements and infrastructure and divided them into three categories.

Of the 47 dangerous lakes on the Kosi, Gandaki and Karnali basins, 31 were found to be at very high risk of bursting and causing damage. Twelve other lakes are at moderate risk and there are four lakes in the lower risk category.

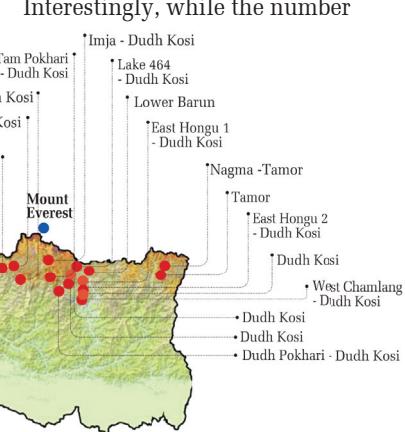
The lakes are expanding because the ice fields feeding them are melting faster due to global heating.

as well as increased deposition of soot particles on the snow.

An ICIMOD assessment last year reported that even in the best case scenario, the Himalaya will lose one-third of its ice and snow during this century. But recent studies have shown that the melting is actually happening faster than previously thought, and is accelerating.

This has increased the number of glacial lakes in the Nepal Himalaya as well as their sizes. For example, remote sensing data in the report showed that there were 3,609 glacial lakes in Nepal's three river basins with a combined area of 180sq km. By 2015, the number had grown to 3,696 and they covered a combined area of 195.4sq km.

Scientists have long noted that the rate of melting is higher in the eastern Himalaya than in the west, and the report confirms this. Interestingly, while the number



UNDP/UNEP

of glacial lakes in the Kosi basin has gone down, their total area has increased by 14sq km — largely because supraglacial ponds have merged, or the lakes have drained without bursting.

The report has also recorded 26 glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) events in the Nepal Himalaya since 1977, but only 14 of them were on lakes located in Nepal. This emphasises the importance of trans-boundary early warning system — especially on lakes in Tibet upstream on the two Bhote Kosi rivers, Tama Kosi, the Arun and others.

# Forests replace glaciers in the Himalaya

New evidence in Nepal of accelerated glacial retreat, with trees where there used to be ice

Tufan Neupane

**A**fter Swiss geologist Toni Hagen arrived in Nepal in 1950, he traversed the country on foot examining rocks to probe the orogenesis of the Himalaya.

He took thousands of photographs and film clips that remain a valuable visual archive of the time. Today, they are a treasure trove for climate researchers to measure the extent of glacial retreat.

Repeat photography has allowed Nepali climate scientists like Shalik Ram Sigdel of the Institute of Tibetan Plateau Research at to plot the rapidity of Himalayan melting due to global warming in the past century.

When Toni Hagen trekked through Manang in 1957, he climbed a slope above the village to take photographs of the northern flank of the Annapurnas. Even at that time, the Gangapurna Glacier had already lost most of its surface ice.

But when Sigdel visited the area and compared it to more recent photographs, he



TONI HAGEN

found the glacier snout had receded 900m up the mountain, leaving a lake at its terminus bracketed by sharply defined lateral moraines.

In a paper titled Retreating Glacier and Advancing Forest Over the Past 200 Years in Central Himalayas published on last week in the *Journal of Geophysical Research – Biogeosciences*, Sigdel with co-authors analyse glacial debris and tree-rings on the Gangapurna and Annapurna III glaciers.

The paper presents the first detailed evidence of fluctuations in Himalayan glaciers over the past 200 years, and concludes that snowlines have been rising and forests advancing higher since 1790s, and intensifying since 1980.

While glaciers have been shrinking and snowlines have been receding ever since the Last Glacial Period 12,000 years ago and the Little Ice Age 700 years ago, this process has amplified after the Industrial Revolution.

The researchers used satellite imagery and field research to find that as the glaciers



NABIN BARAL/THETHIRDPOLENET

**MELTDOWN:** Toni Hagen's photograph in 1957 of the debris-covered Gangapurna Glacier terminus.

The same view in 2010 by Nabin Baral showing the growing glacial lake and vegetation on the terminal moraine.

climate in the Himalaya, examined tree-rings and the vegetation that have colonised the moraines in the past decades.

As shown in before-and-after photographs as well as remote-sensing data, older moraines are already covered by forest. Being darker, the forest absorbs more sunlight than snowfields that earlier reflected light. Together with transpiration, this feedback loop in turn could amplify the warming trend in the Himalaya, the paper concludes.

While warming may favour timber and agriculture production in Nepal, Sigdel says they threaten the dry season water flow in Himalayan rivers that will have consequences downstream.

He adds: "Our research confirms that the climate crisis has been seriously impacting water resources in the Himalaya. The Gangapurna and Annapurna III glaciers feed the Marsyangdi River, and their melting will affect the entire basin, endangering water supply and affecting hydropower generation and irrigation downstream."