





# Transformer Man

An indication of the kleptocracy we live in is that the public regards an honest government official as a messiah. Doctors who do not gouge patients are raised on to pedestals. The public treats a traffic policeman who enforces lane discipline as a saviour. Perhaps only in Nepal can you be a national hero just for doing your job.

Kulman Ghising was appointed Managing Director of the Nepal Electricity Authority (NEA) in August 2016 — a time when the country was suffering 18 hours of power cuts daily. He was the right man for the right job at the right time.

Ghising's predecessors at the NEA had been road contractors, but he was an electrical engineer. Within months of being in office, Ghising had brought load-shedding to an end. He just did what any intelligent engineer would do: he systematically went

brands, and heavy advertisers in the media.

The modus operandi was that selected customers got uninterrupted power supply through dedicated feeds by diverting electricity from household consumers. The NEA told the media there was a demand-supply gap, and blamed the war for delayed power projects.

When Ghising took over at NEA, he cut dedicated feeds to factories, slapped a tariff increase, and also handed them bills for past arrears. NEA's losses were Rs9 billion when Ghising was appointed in 2016 but by the time he left this week, its profit has soared to Rs11.1 billion.

Reduced domestic demand and production from new private power plants meant that imports from India dropped from a peak of 35% of total demand to 22% this year.

Captains of industry, former NEA bosses and their political patrons who are behind the current campaign not to renew Ghising's four-year term which expired on 14 September are the ones who benefited from the rotten system that bled NEA dry and kept Nepalis in darkness for a decade.

As we reported last month, the Energy Ministry had forwarded its endorsement of Ghising's extension to the Cabinet, but it was not

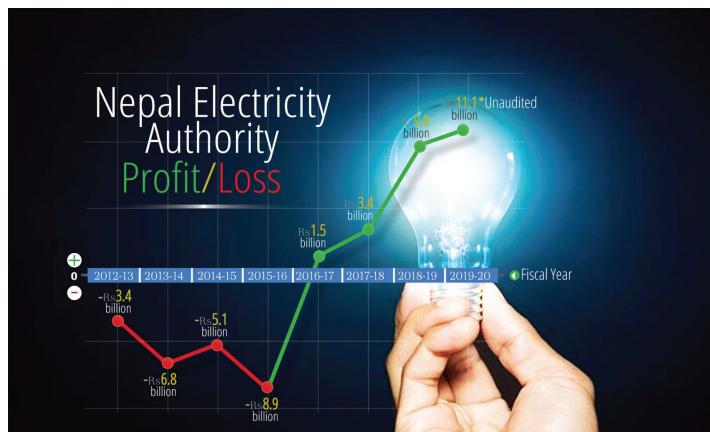
added to the agenda of Monday's meeting. Prime Minister K P Oli is said to be against Ghising's renewal, mainly because he feels the government did not get any credit for ending powercuts, and

because "Kulman became a hero". This envy of Ghising's performance and popularity permeates through the political class.

NCP Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal is said to support Ghising's renewal because it would hurt the party's image in the public eye. Oli's allies, including his new economic adviser Yubaraj Khatiwada and press secretary, have made disparaging remarks about Ghising, and there has also been a social media campaign to smear him.

Some senior NCP members also appear to be wary of Ghising's popularity in case he decides to enter politics. That, actually, may not be such a bad idea. The performance of anyone who succeeds Ghising at NEA will be under close public scrutiny anyway, and the can-do style of this "Cool Man" may have much more impact as a politician.

Kulman Ghising should not be MD, but MP. Perhaps, even an Energy Minister someday.



about cutting system loss and increasing supply.

Ghising reduced leakage from 26% to 15% by cracking down on pilferage and upgrading infrastructure. He cut off 24-hour dedicated feeds through which his predecessors provided businesses low tariff electricity in return for kickbacks.

And he met the remaining shortfall with increased production from private power producers, as well as imports from India.

Nepal's dark age is a memory now. There used to be public jubilation when NEA announced that power cuts would be reduced from 18 hours to 14 hours a day. The candle industry did brisk business, inverters and solar systems flew off the shelves. Nepalis were so glad the war was over, they did not have the heart to complain.

It was only later that investigative reports in this paper and elsewhere revealed the level of malfeasance and mismanagement behind power cuts. Documents show that through the tenures of managing directors Mukesh Kafle, Arjun Karki and Rameswor Yadav, NEA sold electricity in the black market to major industries, some of which are well known

**Kulman Ghising should not be renewed as MD, he can be an MP**

## 20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Twenty years ago in the week 20-26 September 2000, *Nepali Times* #10 carried an investigative piece on the mountains of cash lying idle in Nepal, while the country faced a financial crunch.

The edition also carried a story on domestic airlines, and their promising future. Two decades later, domestic airlines in Nepal have been badly hurt by the lockdowns, and are resuming limited operations this week after six months of Covid-19 restrictions on internal air travel.

Two decades ago, Nepal used to suffer frequent political lockdowns called 'bandhs' enforced by opposition political parties. Hemlata Rai's story, 'Yet another Bandh' highlighted the collateral damage of these shutdowns on the economy.

Excerpts from the stories:

**Money, money everywhere:** The dozen commercial banks have more than Rs40 billion cash in hand waiting to be invested. There are also 50 or so finance companies, co-operatives and trusts sitting on an estimated Rs 45 billion. Add to that the 5 percent or so of their savings that Nepalis tend to keep at home, and one comes up with a colossal Rs 90 billion lying around unproductively. That, of course, doesn't take into account the investments in gold which cannot even be estimated.

The availability of so much money has had a direct impact on the country's capital market, leading to a drop in interest rates to the lowest levels ever-lower even than the inflation rate. Several banks do not accept new accounts, and many have begun investing in foreign banks.

**Fasten your seat belts:** Nepal's airline industry is taking another big leap



forward in October as domestic airlines prepare to expand their fleets, giving Nepali passengers and tourists a new range of choice. However, the big question is will they survive the price hike in aviation fuel? And with both our airport aprons and the skies above congested, where is the space for all these new planes? The industry has passed through its first shakeout after Nepal's domestic sector was deregulated eight years ago. Fly-by-nights have been weeded out and the airlines that survived like Necon Air and new entrants such as Buddha Air, Mountain Air, Yeti Airways, Shangri-la Airways, Skyline, and Cosmic Air show new confidence in the market.

**Yet another 'bandh':** The approach to the 21 September bandh called by the coalition of nine minor leftist parties saw a hardening of postures by both the organisers and the government.

The bandh calls for the complete closure of all transport, educational institutions, factories and markets to protest the government's failure to address a host of issues, including immediate implementation of a two-year-old agreement between the government and the communist grouping. Other major demands are the demolishing of the Laxmanpur barrage, scrapping of the Citizenship Bill, withdrawal of the title of "royal highness" from Paras Shah and bringing him to justice, arrangement of employment for freed kamaiyas, termination of the 1950 treaty between Nepal and India. The protest is also aimed at corruption, price hike, increased salary and allowance of parliamentarians and "unpatriotic activities" by the Prime Minister during his visit to India.

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

## ONLINE PACKAGES



WALKABOUT: CHIBA

There once used to be more chaityas in Kathmandu than houses. Heritage Conservationist Anil Chitrakar explains the significance of these shrines (also known as chiba) and what they tell us about the Buddha's teachings. Watch the new episode of Walkabout with Anil on the *Nepali Times* YouTube channel.



DYNAMIC CERAMIC

At Cera Nepal in Bhaktapur, new mothers and youth seeking recreational activities during the lockdown are taking pottery classes to de-stress while reviving a traditional skill. Subscribe to the *Nepali Times* YouTube channel for videos like this. Story: *page 7*.

### BORIS LISSANEVITCH

What a character and a colourful life ('Nepal's tourism now has to re-start from zero', Lisa Choegyal, #1027). He and Nepal must rather have suited each other. Thank you for the insights into the country at that time.

Tim Lyall

- As always, a beautifully written story of times gone by in Kathmandu. As you say, we will have to re-boot Nepali tourism from scratch.

Tony Parr

- Even saying the name 'Boris Lissanevitch' sounds magical and this piece makes the legendary character come alive again.

Devendra Basnet

- His exit was not as glamorous as his entry. No doubt he is the father of tourism in Nepal but he was a bad businessman and was crushed by his counterpart. With all his contribution to the industry, it is sad that he ended up penniless in a public ward at Bir Hospital in 1985.

Ram Chhetri

- I seriously doubt there is a place on the planet so well-endowed with amazing first-hand anecdotes likes these. How fortunate they have such a skilled, beguiling, uniquely placed author.

Tony Jones

- Great story from a time that no longer exists. I had the privilege of meeting Inger while she lived in Bhaktapur.

Jan Møller Hansen

- Whilst it refers to a time long before my initial arrival in Kathmandu, I have to say it makes me homesick for the place, no matter where I am in the world the thought of Nepal is never far away.

Ben Roberts

### GLACIAL RETREAT

While global warming and glacial retreat is an unmitigated disaster for the world it is encouraging to note that the newly exposed moraines and glacial valleys are able to regenerate in the form of new forests and I guess ultimately food producing opportunities ('Forests replace glaciers in the Himalaya', Tufan Neupane, #1027). This new growth will help prevent erosion and will also add a mixture of vegetation into what could otherwise look a very desolate landscape. Maybe in 100 years time the opportunity for a renewable resource and opportunity for new tourism activities.

Ian Wall

### SUICIDES AND LOCKDOWN

This is the most sensible article I have read on suicide so far in Nepali media ('Have suicides increased during Nepal lockdown?', Rastriyata Bhandari, nepalitimes.com).

Sumnima Sampang

### RANA DYNASTY

Very interesting in-depth observations ('Inside story of Nepal's Rana dynasty', Kunda Dixit, #1027). I've read this monumental book twice. Kudos to the author and to the reviewer.

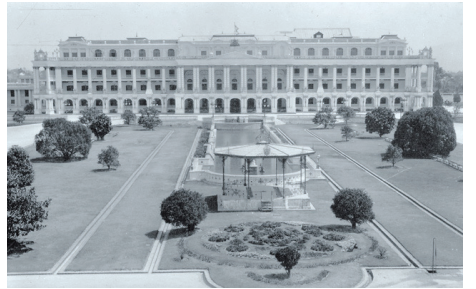
Arvind Rimal

### WORKERS BACK TO INDIA

This is extremely tragic that they are being compelled to go back to India during the peak of Covid ('Nepali workers returning to India', Upasana Khadka, nepalitimes.com). This is not at all their choice but an obligation.

Chandra GT

Times.com



## Inside story of Nepal's Rana dynasty

by Kunda Dixit

From the rise of Jung Bahadur Kunwar to the ultimate downfall of the Shumshers, the Rana legacy still casts a long shadow over Nepal. This Nepali Times longread is a review of two books about the dynasty penned by Ranases themselves.

Most reached and shared on Facebook



## Forests replace glaciers in the Himalaya

by Tufan Neupane

A new paper presents the first detailed evidence of fluctuations in Himalayan glaciers, concluding that snow lines have been rising and forests advancing higher. Detailed report and analysis is at [nepalitimes.com](http://nepalitimes.com)

Most popular on Twitter



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

by Lisa Choegyal

This nostalgic look back at Boris Lissanevitch, father of Nepal's tourism and his Royal Hotel was the most popular story of the week. Many readers sent in comments with their memories of the man. Go to our website for full piece and check out feedback.

Most visited online page

Most commented

## QUOTE TWEETS

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
In this Saturday's longread, @KundaDixit brings the inside story of #Nepal's Rana dynasty as told by Ranases themselves. Review of two books about the dynasty that ruled Nepal for 104 years. #history

**Nareesh Phuyal @nareesh\_phuyal**  
Inside stories from Rana aristocracy have come time and again. But the real fates of Jung Bahadur's own children have always remained somewhat unknown. Who among the Jung Bahadur's children/grandchildren rose to a prominence? A write-up on this would be highly appreciated.

**Sandee pGurung @Sandeeep52000698**  
Very interesting. If the article was so good then imagine how intriguing the book would be. Waiting eagerly for the lockdown to be over, to enjoy reading it.

**Binaya @acharyabinaya**  
A biopic on Jung Bhadrur would be.... epic! Hope somebody in Bollywood is up for the challenge.

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
In 1955 Boris Lisanevitch persuaded King Mahendra to invite the first tour group to #Nepal. We haven't had zero tourists in #Kathmandu since, until #COVID19 hit. @lisachoegyalcelebrates Boris' role in Nepal's #tourism that now has to restart from zero.

**Kushal Achhami @kushalac555**  
The guy started hotel business concept in Nepal; massive boost to tourism sector of Nepal.

**Nepali Times @NepaliTimes**  
Have #suicides increased during #Nepal #lockdown? On #WorldSuicidePreventionDay, researcher RastriyataBhandari cautions against drawing a correlation with #COVID19 lockdown. #Mentalhealth

**Ajay Pradhan @ajayspradhan**  
Suicide from the consequences from loss of income should be seen together with government extravagance and indulgence in tea and snacks. This is mind boggling.

Times

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# Uma Bhujel in and out of prison

The war is long over, but this ex-guerrilla is still breaking out of jail

Tufan Neupane

Maoist guerrilla Uma Bhujel has spent her entire revolutionary life in and out of jail. During the war, she was captured, made a jail break, was recaptured, and escaped again. After the ceasefire in 2006, she was nominated to the Constituent Assembly and joined the YCL.

But since then, as a semi-underground member of the Biplav faction of Maoists, she has again been in and out of jail 12 times in eight months, accused of being in possession of weapons.

After being shunted around the country on court summons, she appealed to the Supreme Court which ordered her release on 30 August. But as soon as she was released from detention in Sunsari, she gave police the slip and has vanished again.

All this would have been farcical enough. But what even more ironical is that she is being released by the judicial system of a state that she has taken up arms against, and is being detained by a police force under direct command of Ram Bahadur Thapa, her former Maoist comrade who is now Home Minister.

Since December, Uma Bhujel has been arrested, released, re-arrested, relocated and presented before multiple district courts.

“After filing and losing all their cases, the Nepal Police has no charges left against Uma Bhujel,” says her lawyer Ekraj Bhandari, who is now suing the police for harassment of his client.

One of the Supreme Court’s



A PEOPLE WAR

**IN THE FRONTLINES:** Uma Bhujel (centre, above) as a Brigade Commissar with comrades after an ambush in Gorkha in 1997 that killed three policemen.

Bhujel looking at her photograph in the book, *A People War* in 2010 (right).

core values is to uphold the independence of Nepal’s judiciary so that it can perform its duties without political interference and preserve the principles of democracy, multi-party and an open society.

Initially, Bhujel was charged with organising explosions, possession of arms and ammunition, crimes against the state, and high treason. The Communist Party of Nepal Maoist (as opposed to the ruling Nepal Communist Party which is an alliance of the former UML and the Maoist party) went underground

after being banned.

After police arrested her in December last year in Sunsari, she was detained for 25 days. Tried in court on a weapons charge, she was ordered released on bail. But just as she paid her bail, police re-arrested her and handed her over to Jhapa police.

She was detained in Jhapa for 22 days, and on the 14 February she was released on bail for Rs50,000. Again, as her lawyer paid the bail she was taken in and driven to Dhanusha where the court ordered her release on a bail of Rs30,000, but she was re-arrested and taken this time all the way to Kailali in western Nepal on 31 May in the middle of a pandemic.

There, the court declared her innocent and ordered her release. Police then brought her to Gorkha where the district court again said on 2 June that she should be freed.



ARPAN SHARMA / PEOPLE AFTER WAR

But police once more dragged her to the Lalitpur District Court where she was again ordered to be released.

In a pattern that had by then become familiar, she was rearrested and presented at the Kathmandu District Court which again released her without bail on 11 June. After that, police got her tried in courts in Bhojpur, Sankhuwasabha, Dharan and Saptari until Uma’s niece Pratima Bhujel appealed directly to the Supreme Court.

At the Supreme Court, Bhujel made three requests: that she not be handed from one district to another, to be tried in front of the Supreme Court, and not to be ever arrested again without reason. On the 23 August, the Supreme Court issued Nepal Police 24 hours to show cause.

The bench of Justices Om

Prakash Mishra and Bamkumar Shrestha said, “Personal freedom cannot be restricted except in accordance with the rule of law. The petitioner cannot be considered to be in judicial custody as there is no proper and sufficient basis and reason of keeping her in custody and conducting an investigation.”

On 30 August Uma Bhujel was finally ordered to be released from her jail cell in Sunsari. However, as she was being taken out she escaped, and has been underground since.

All this is nothing new for Bhujel. During the war, she was captured in 1998 in Tandrang of Gorkha, and was in jail for one year where she was tortured. She made a jail break and was captured again.

She has written about her dramatic jail break in the book ‘Historical Gorkha Jailbreak’. There have been documentaries and features films made about her life. 🇳🇵

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# Rare anti-cancer tree on verge of extinction

Only few hundred Maire's yew trees are left in Nepal's mountain wilderness

Kumar Paudel

The Himalayan mountains are known as a treasure trove of medicinal plants, many of which have not even been scientifically studied. But one rare tree with proven anti-cancer property is on the verge of extinction, and needs urgent protection.

Maire's yew (*Taxus mairei* or '*Lauth Salla*' in Nepali) is a conifer that used to be abundant in the mountains of central Nepal. Because of unsustainable harvesting, there are less than 500 mature trees left in the wild.

Yews have healing properties for several ailments, but it is for treating cancer that it is most valued, and that is also why the trees are being over-exploited. Their leaves, bark and trunks contain a compound called taxol, proven to inhibit the growth of new cancer cells.

Maire's yew is one of the three *Taxus* species found in the country. While *Taxus contorta* is distributed from west to central Nepal, *Taxus wallichiana* (Himalayan yew) is found in central to east Nepal. But the rarest *Taxus mairei* is found only in Kavre, Makwanpur and Sindhuli districts in the mountains near Kathmandu Valley.

*Taxus mairei* is classified as 'Vulnerable' in the IUCN red list and as critically endangered species in Nepal.

However, although poachers and their suppliers harvest them at night to smuggle them out, most local people till recently used to be unaware of its value.

I have worked in conservation in Nepal for a decade, but had never paid attention to the diversity of yews. It was only when I was at Oxford surrounded by English yews (*Taxus baccata*) that I grew curious



Leaves of Maire's Yew.

PHOTOS: KUMAR PAUDEL/GREENHOOD NEPAL

about the species back home.

This led me to research the mid-mountains of central Nepal in 2018 to estimate wild population of Maire's yew and harvesting practices of local communities.

I still remember that day: it was raining, we were tired of travelling on a motorbike along treacherous roads in Dhungharka of Kavre in search of '*Lauth Salla*'.

After six hours, a farmer pointed us to a stone quarry where a few excavators were busy gouging out a slope. He took us to a tree growing near a watermill next to the quarry.

It had dark green needle-like leaves, arranged spirally in two flat rows either side of the stem, and had a pleasant smell. Unlike the Himalayan yew, it had unclear and fewer bud scales. Its bark was covered in dust from the quarry, turning reddish grey from brown and had numerous bruises from being hacked by axes.

We had confirmed our first sighting of Marie's yew, but seeing how close the excavators were, my



Propagated *Taxus mairei* in a nursery.

joy turned to apprehension. The 300-year old tree clung to a slope with metamorphic rock and the only reason it was still standing was because the locals worshipped

the outcrop, believing it to be a manifestation of Lord Shiva.

But after three centuries, it was clear that this tree's days were numbered. Even faith was

unlikely to save it – the quarry was expanding and encroaching on the shrine. The local community seemed to be unaware of the tree's medicinal property, nor its conservation importance. For them, it was just another old tree.

Upon returning to Kathmandu, we wrote an appeal to save the tree and sent it out to the Kavre district forest office and the prime minister's staff. Kathmandu newspapers wrote about it, and the Division Forest Officer took action to save the tree.

Ten months later, we went back to the site and found an information board explaining the conservation importance of the tree. A barbed wire fence surrounded it, and the same farmer who had guided us to the site earlier told us how the tree had now become an attraction, and local people were protecting it.

The yew is just one of the many trees in Nepal and worldwide that are endangered – most without even being studied for their medicinal and other properties. Nepal's community forestry program has won international praise for restoring the country's tree cover and locals have played a remarkable role in the conservation.

But the communities are struggling to retain the programs, and reap rewards for conservation efforts. If allowed to sustainably harvest the leaves of yew trees, the money could be ploughed back into further conservation.

Knowledge about indigenous plant species and their sustainable use can help both the community and nature conservation. Nepal can successfully restore yews in the wild, and reap profits from their commercial cultivation given increasing market demand.

But first, we need to save the last few hundred Maire's yews that are left. 📌



Kumar Paudel is pursuing an MPhil from the University of Cambridge and is co-founder of Greenhood Nepal based in Kathmandu.

# Caught on camera: Nepal's rare fishing cat

Recent camera trap images confirm the existence of this endangered feline

Swechhya Shrestha  
in Kapilvastu

Cats generally are not fond of water, and avoid swimming. But not fishing cats.

These medium-sized wild cats of South and Southeast Asia thrive near wetlands and are found 'fishing' for prey on ponds, rivers and lakes.

But habitat loss and destruction of wetlands, and declining fish population have led to the decline of these cats. The endangered cats had not been spotted in Nepal's Jagdishpur reservoir (listed on the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance) since 2014, until this year.

Fishing cats used to be seen in Bardia, Chitwan and Parsa National Parks and in Kosi Tappu Wildlife Reserve in Nepal's Tarai, and mainly prefer the floodplains of the Karnali, Babai, Rapti, Narayani, Kosi and Reu Rivers and the Ghodaghodi Tal.

Earlier a team of researchers went to look for this elusive cat and to understand its current status in Jagdishpur. Local villagers confirmed that there had indeed been a decrease in sightings in the recent years. Many others in the community had little or no knowledge of the species and its habits.

Camera traps were deployed and a local team member Anil Chaudhary was provided with the responsibility to monitor the feed for 15 days. The next two weeks were crucial.

Within days there had been possible



sightings on camera stations 64m, 298m and 468m away from the reservoir. Replaying the clips, it was confirmed that they were indeed fishing cats.

Threatened by destruction of wetlands and poaching, fishing cat (*Prionailurus viverrinus*) population has declined at an alarming rate within all range countries and is listed as

Vulnerable on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List.

Considered indicator species, their absence or presence also signifies if a body of water is ecologically sound and flourishing. Besides fish, they also prey on smaller animals and insects that destroy agricultural crops. But farmers and fishermen consider them a

nuisance and often beat them to death.

Fishing cat's nature to hunt in water sets it apart from other land dwelling felines. It has water resistant fur and webbed feet to help with swimming and fishing. It is also about twice the size of domestic cats with head to body length ranging from 57 to 78cm and tail, which is 20 to 30cm long.

Based on its shape, size and diet and its inability to roar, fishing cat is classified into the group of small cats. But of the 12 species of wild cats found in Nepal, only five (Royal Bengal Tiger, Snow Leopard, Clouded Leopard, Lynx and Leopard Cat) are included in the protected species list under the National Park and Wildlife Conservation Act 1973.

Nepal has however, categorised it as endangered but there has been no conservation efforts. It is important to raise community awareness about the ecological importance of this animal, especially now that the sightings have been made.

Children in local schools should be taught about them and interested locals should be encouraged to work on their conservation.

This year's study was supported by the Rufford Foundation and the Small Mammals Conservation and Research Foundation. 📌



Swechhya Shrestha is a graduate of Environmental Science and research assistant at the Small Mammals Conservation and Research Foundation (SMCRF) in Kathmandu.





# Standing up to be counted next year

The country's first federal-era national census in 2021 will coincide with the Covid-19 crisis

Chetan Adhikari

Nepal's first federalism-era census, slated for mid-2021, promises to usher in a new age of data analytics for national development through its revamped methods, techniques and approach.

Under the slogan 'My Census, My Participation', the National Population and Household Census 2021 will provide the blueprint for the work in the coming decade for all three tiers of government.

The government hopes that the new census data will ease the transition into the federal system with a much more accurate data base that will go beyond just a headcount but also show if and how citizens are enjoying their fundamental rights, privileges and facilities guaranteed to them by law and the constitution.

Resource allocation by these three tiers of government will be dependent on data from the census, and how it is interpreted.

Even by early next year, the impact of the Covid-19 crisis will still be present when enumerators fan out across the country for the once-a-decade exercise. Planners from the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) and National Planning Commission (NPC) have said that they will be using state of the art information technology for the census. Plans for a 'virtual census' have been set in case the pandemic continues to be a threat into next year.

At present the census is set for 9 May to 22 June 2021, and will be divided into two phases. The preliminary phase from 9 to 28 May will consist of supervisors filling listing forms for numbers

of family members per household. The second phase, from 8-22 June, will see the central questionnaires for demographic and financial data being used.

The census will replace outdated pre-federalism data which are not in line with the new government structure. Local governments and agencies have been designated based on the 2011 data, which are mostly outdated and inaccurate. Nepal's population will have expanded from 26.6 million in that census to more than 30 million by next year.

Pre-federalism Nepal was divided into five development zones and 265 constituencies. During the first general elections under the federal constitution in 2017, there were seven provinces and 165 constituencies, the nearly 3,915 VDCs were replaced with 293 urban and 460 rural municipalities.

To better suit the federalism model, ward-level and community-level questionnaires are being used for the first time. This will allow authorities to address issues such as women, child and dalit rights, social security and residence particular to each community.

With its new community-centric approach, the census will bridge gaps between local, provincial and federal government so that specific plans can be made to address them.

Changes to the questionnaire have been introduced to diversify the data gathered. 25 questionnaires are registered in the first phase of the census while there are 55 in the second. A community set of 100 questionnaires is a newer addition, and data from it is received from ward offices and filled by supervisors themselves.

Families' access to banks and financial institutions and weight of loans and debt will be incorporated in the new census. Questions regarding occupational training and vocational education within a family are also new additions as the census aims to identify skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled manpower present in the community.

New questions to gather data on a family's means of feeding

themselves and household provisions have also been set. Houses built on government grants will be identified in the new census.

A new 'modified de jure' method has been introduced to reduce inaccuracies in counting the population. A person could previously be counted from both their site of residence and their site of employment. To avoid redundancies, an individual will now either be counted from the site they are most active in or the site they prefer to be counted from. Those with no fixed residences, such as sadhus or the homeless will be counted on the final day of the census from the places they are located.

While the pilot census of June 2020 was affected by the pandemic and lockdown, planners remain confident of conducting next year's census on time. Preparatory work has already begun as questionnaire design, census mapping, publicity and communication and training of supervisors are all underway for 50,000 enumerators who have been mobilised across the country in preparation.

Nepal's census has its origins in wartime. The first four censuses were held in 1911 to 1941, before or during the World Wars, when Nepal's Rana rulers who had promised soldiers for the British Army needed to know the numbers of young men from specific ethnic groups who could be mobilised.

The country's first census using non-military and modern methods was conducted in 1951, and has been held every ten years after that. The first computer arrived in Nepal during the 1971 census, a second generation IBM-1401 that used tape drives for storage and punch cards for data entry.

The 1981 census was conducted using a state-of-the-art British-made ICL 2950 with one megabyte of RAM and a 640 MB hard drive in addition to 800 gigabytes of storage drives, which came in four units. That may seem like nothing these days, but it did what it was supposed to do in its day. 🇳🇵

## Worldlink

Worldlink is set to issue shares to the public within three years to expand its internet services through domestic investments, said chairman Dilip Agrawal at a virtual



program held on 15 September to mark the service provider's 25th anniversary. He said Worldlink was setting up its own server in the country to speed up the net. The number of internet users in Nepal has increased by 50% since the COVID-19 lockdown. Chairman of the National Innovation Center Mahavir Pun said his organisation was pushing infotech in Nepal.

## Samsung Dasain offer

Samsung has introduced the 'Jodhdae Khusi Sajau Jindagi' offer for the Dasain season with discounts of up to 35% on its wide



range of television and home appliances, TVs, Refrigerators and Washing Machines. The items will be home delivered and have 2 year warranty and are available from Samsung Plaza website at <http://news.samsung.com>

## Qatar Airways

Qatar Airways began operating three weekly flights to and from Kathmandu from 5 September. All arriving passengers to Nepal must have negative PCR results from tests conducted within 72 hours of their scheduled flight time, and must have



completed an online entry form. Qatar also issued on-board COVID-19 safety precautions, which include PPE for cabin crew and a complimentary protective kit and face shields for passengers. Hamad International Airport in Doha has stringent cleaning procedures and applies social distancing measures throughout its terminals.

## Hyundai Aura S

Hyundai vehicles has unveiled its new Hyundai Aura S in Nepal. The sedan's 1.2l

## Trekking from 17 October

Nepal's Cabinet decided this week to allow domestic flights, intercity buses, hotels and restaurants to reopen from 17 September and foreigners for trekking and mountaineering from 17 October.

The decision was welcome relief to Nepal's domestic airlines which have had most of their planes and helicopters grounded for the past six months. However, they want the government to lift the restriction on carrying only 50% passengers, because it is not economically viable.

Tourism brought in \$700 million in 2018-19, and makes up 8% of Nepal's GDP. Nearly half-a-million Nepalis are directly employed in the trekking and mountaineering sector, with 2 million others benefiting indirectly from tourism.

Kappa Dual VTVT Petrol engine features a more effective and comfortable design, improved fuel efficiency, and an advanced safety system. The Hyundai Aura S will be available in Nepal in Fiery Red, Titan Grey,



Typhoon Silver, and Polar White at Rs3.39 million.

## Sunrise Green Pin

Sunrise Bank has launched a Green PIN service in a bid to make all its debit card, credit card and international card transactions more secure and convenient, minimising the need for paper PIN mailers on bank-issued cards. Customers will receive a Green PIN via SMS on their registered phone numbers as soon as they use their new card at any ATM service.

## City Express TikTok

City Express Money Transfer, the main sponsor of Prakash Saput's widely popular song Galbandi, has organised the City Express Galbandi TikTok challenge for TikTok users at home and abroad. The



first, second and third best videos among participants of the challenge will be awarded cash prizes. Participants must post their videos on TikTok by 30 September, while results will be published on 6 October.

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## EVENTS

## Sunday Sessions

This week, songwriter and music producer Jerusha Rai will join journalist Prateebha Tuladhar in a discussion about her journey in music. Tune in to the livestream on Facebook. Get additional information at the Quixote's Cove Facebook page.

20 September



## Virtual Education Symposium

The British Council Nepal is set to host its 4th Education Symposium, which will bring together policymakers, planners, administrators, head teachers, teachers, researchers, NGOs, and private sector and development partners to discuss issues around this year's theme School Leadership, its principles and practices in Nepal.

23-27 September

## Le Sherpa Farmers Market

Le Sherpa weekly farmers market resumes from this week. Shop for fresh and organic vegetables, fruit, cheese, bread, meat products, honey, and much more. Go to Le Sherpa Farmer Market's Facebook page to learn about physical distancing measures and rules while shopping.

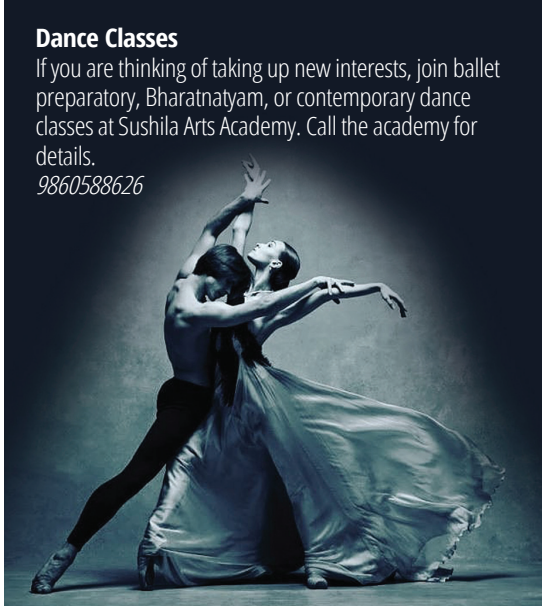
Saturday, 8am-12:30pm, Le Sherpa Maharajgunj



## Dance Classes

If you are thinking of taking up new interests, join ballet preparatory, Bharatnatyam, or contemporary dance classes at Sushila Arts Academy. Call the academy for details.

9860588626



## #HerJourney

The second guest of Girls in Tech-Nepal's #HerJourney series will feature Gunakeshri Pradhan Manandhar, former Director of Nepal Telecom and Nepal's first female computer engineer. She is currently president of non-profit Women in Information Technology, which aims to help and support women in technical fields. Register for the event at <https://bit.ly/3jXnen0>.

19th September 5pm-7pm

## ONLINE ARCHIVES

## Revisionist History

In Revisionist History, The New Yorker's Malcolm Gladwell re-examines overlooked and misunderstood elements from events, people, ideas, and even songs of the past. Find the podcast on Stitcher and Apple Podcast.



## Crash Course

A channel started by authors/educators John and Hank Green of Vogbrothers fame, Crash Course is a one stop destination for a variety of educational material. Watch tons of awesome courses in one channel, from organic chemistry to literature to mythology.

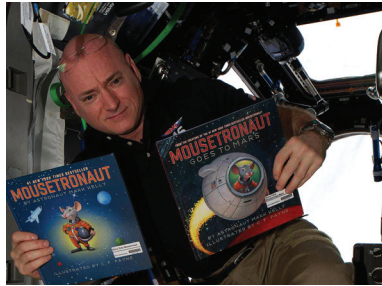
## Amazing Libraries

Take a virtual trip to 11 historic and beautiful libraries around the world through the Amazing Libraries Google Earth tour, including the New York Public Library, Klementinum in the Czech Republic, Bibliotheca Alexandrina in Egypt.



## Katha Ghera

Some of Katha Ghera's plays are now on YouTube. Watch *Night, Mother*, and *Dayalu Rukh*, the Nepali interpretation of *The Giving Tree*.



## Storytime from space

Perfect for young kids with an interest in astronomy and space exploration, the Storytime from Space series features astronauts on the International Space Station reading children's literature. Find the playlist and watch with children at: <https://storytimefromspace.com/library/>

## Gelato

Enjoy the end-of-summer afternoons with fresh ice cream from Gelato. Browse the menu at Foodmandu to get ice cream from the classic cookies and cream to the charcoal gelato and every flavour in between



## Tasneem's Kings Kitchen

Order Tasneem's mouth watering biryani, or peruse through the menu for your fill of flavourful, spicy and savoury dishes. Order from Foodmandu.

9801121212

## Dhokaima Cafe

Safely distanced tables and mask rules apply as this Patan café reopens on the weekend. Special menu items and drinks in the courtyard or terrace. Takeaway service also available.

Patan Dhoka (01) 5522113



## Raithaane

Eat your way through Nepal at Raithaane, a restaurant committed to using locally sourced food. Each dish on the menu is connected to different communities of the nation. Look at the menu online. 12pm-7pm, Patan Darbar Square, 9801002971



## Chez Caroline

Tucked away from the street noise and fumes, this is the place to visit for authentic French and continental cuisine. The restaurant offers takeaway services too. Try the Profiteroles au Chocolat and Choux pastry filled with vanilla ice cream and hot chocolate sauce. Baber Mahal (01) 4263070/ 9841569365

## DINING



## The Village Cafe

Get fresh, delicious, home-made Newa cuisine from The Village Cafe. Order the sel roti mix, frozen momo and khuwa. Look at the menu on Foodmandu or Facebook. (01) 5540712 / 9842425127

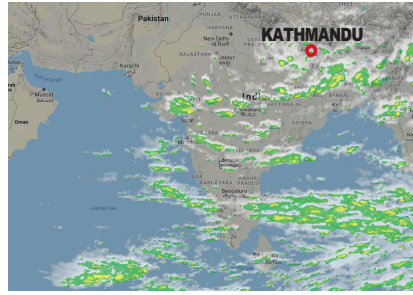


## Freddo Cafe

Look no further than Freddo Cafe for all things pizza. Try the Calzone and the Four Cheese pizzas. Find the menu on Foodmandu. 9818883350 (01) 4218792

QATAR AIRWAYS القطرية

Going places together - [qatarairways.com](https://qatarairways.com)

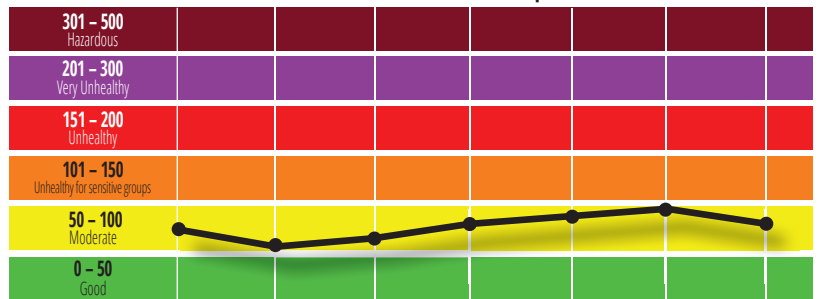


After the burst of rain this week, the monsoon is in retreat. But it still packs a punch, and will deliver some more sharp showers on Friday as it falls back. The weekend is expected to be relatively rain-free. The westerlies are now beginning to manifest themselves, and this means drier air that will blow away much of the moisture back to the Bay of Bengal. We will get afternoon buildup along the mountains, and possibility of localised night rain. Mornings will be nippier.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
27° 17°	28° 17°	29° 17°

## AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 11 - 17 Sept



PM2.5

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY
September 11	September 12	September 13	September 14	September 15	September 16	September 17

With vehicles back on the streets and businesses open after six months of Covid-19 lockdown, the air quality in Kathmandu's city centre has predictably worsened. The daily average Air Quality Index (AQI) was in the yellow 'moderate' zone throughout the week, and almost touched the 'Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups' Orange Zone on Wednesday. With the rains tapering off, and more cars on the roads, chances are AQI will worsen further.

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

## ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI

KRIPA JOSHI



## PREVENT WILDFIRES

Recently, there have been unprecedented wildfires causing havoc around the world. Rising temperatures, a key indicator of climate change, causes moisture to be drawn out from plants, making them more flammable. In these "tinderbox conditions", fires can spread very quickly over large areas.

Wildfires are dangerous for life, property, plants and the ecosystems. They also cause premature deaths due to poor air quality and are a major driver of greenhouse gas emissions. But only 4% of global wildfires are started naturally, chiefly by lightning.

Climate change will continue to drive temperatures up and cause unpredictable rainfall in many parts of the world, which means "fire weather" conditions is expected to increase in the coming decades. We need to tackle man-made climate change by lowering greenhouse gases. And if we live in fire-prone areas, we have to be mindful and vigilant to prevent wildfires. #FridaysForFuture



## OUR PICK

A father deals with an accusation that his 14-year-old son is a murderer in Apple TV+'s crime drama *Defending Jacob*, based on the 2012 novel of the same name by William Landay. Chris Evans portrays Andy Barber, assistant district attorney investigating the homicide of his son's classmate when he finds murder weapon hidden in Jacob's room. Jaeden Martell and Michelle Dockery also star.

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

फोन: नं. १०९८ मा खबर गरौं ।



नेपाल सरकार

सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय

सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग



# Take to pottery during the pandemic

Ceramics classes allow Bhaktapur potters to keep family heritage alive, while giving people a chance to de-stress



PHOTOS: MONIKA DEUPALA

Monika Deupala

As Nepal's lockdown goes into its seventh month, albeit relaxing, people are taking up new indoor hobbies and finding ways to do more creative and calming activities. One of them is taking up ceramics.

And where else to discover one's talent for the craft than in Bhaktapur, the centre of traditional pottery in Kathmandu Valley. The craft demands patience and concentration as a lump of clay is moulded on the potter's wheel, fired and then turned into a work of art.

Archana Panthi, 25, a theatre artist from Kathmandu used to buy ceramic gifts for friends, but decided to use the lockdown to learn pottery herself. She enrolled in Cera Nepal when the lockdown was eased, and the experience was so positive that she is determined to go back now that travel restrictions have been lifted.

"The owner gave us instructions, and we moulded the clay with our palms and fingers, and once they were ready we could even take it back with us, it was a whole new experience," Panthi says.

Cera Nepal is a company specialising in fine ceramics, and builds on Bhaktapur's pottery



tradition, but instead of just making flower pots or water containers, it tries to be more creative with different items and innovative designs.

For Ratna Prasad Prajapati, 47, setting up Cera Nepal Udyog in 1984 was just an extension of his ancestral occupation of potters. He admits that when he was younger he was not so interested in the profession of his forebears, and dabbled in importing and selling TV sets.

But he switched, and found that innovating and improving on traditional pottery items was actually quite a lucrative business. He started producing crockery sets for hotels, decorative pieces, earthenware, and lately even new designs for terracotta tiles for

flooring and roofs.

"What we make is still what our ancestors made, we have just tinkered with the techniques by glazing so that the items have a shine, have different colours and designs and also make the items more aesthetic," Prajapati explains.

Unlike other businessmen, Prajapati does not want to keep the skill and craft to himself, but share it as widely as possible, which is why he has started taking on students into his ceramics school. It is a way to not just keep his family occupation alive, but also spread the traditions among other Nepalis who can experiment with new techniques.

"It takes days to see a blob of clay transform itself into a perfectly blended crockery set. That is what

is most satisfying, and it is also very soothing work and calms the mind," adds Prajapati, whose daughter Alina is now managing the company.

Due to the pandemic, however, business is down. It was Alina's idea to offer pottery lessons when the restrictions were lifted in July. The classes were held only on weekends, there was a limited number of apprentices and proper precautions were taken to space them out.

Alina Prajapati has been watching her father working on the potter's wheel from a young age. Like her father, she tried other jobs, but has returned to the family's pottery business with new ideas and innovation.

"I barely see people of my generation going back to their traditional family occupations, but after I saw the potential of ceramics I thought it was high time I helped my father with his business," says 25-year-old Alina, who hopes that the classes will take off once the lockdown is fully lifted.

Subekchya KC, 35 was on her maternity break before lockdown and joined the pottery lessons at Cera Nepal, bringing along her older four-year-old son. She says, "It was a break for me. I forgot all my stress while making a bowl or ceramic plate. And my son found it lots of fun too. I completely forgot about postpartum angst, it was a real stress buster for me."

Pottery making has often been described as being therapeutic. The mind is focused on what one wants to create, and it needs concentration and delicate work. Alina Prajapati says there have been many troubled adolescents who have found it to be useful to relax mind and body.

Sushil Shrestha, 34, used to work in an event management company and had a stressful job. It took just one session at Cera Nepal to change his entire outlook on life, friends, work and family.

He says, "A day spent in front of the potter's wheel has taught me to be more patient and concentrated on creating something. It is good therapy to be focused on what you want to do".

For Rajiv Sharma, 37, it was boredom during the lockdown that made him enroll at Cera Nepal. He took his young son along, who was also tired of being at home.

"Making something out of nothing was a great experience, it also allowed me to bond better with my son and we enjoyed shaping the clay together," Sharma says.

Both Ratna and Alina Prajapati have restarted the ceramics classes with partial lifting of the lockdown. They see it as their responsibility to society to keep their family heritage alive, while giving people a chance to destress during the Covid-19 crisis. 🇳🇵



# The Himalayan Odyssey

By Jimmy Roberts

*Lieutenant Colonel J O M Roberts (1916–1997) was a decorated British Army officer, who joined the military in India so he could climb mountains. He lived in Nepal from 1958 till his death in 1997. He is known as the ‘father of trekking’ having set up Nepal’s first trekking agency, Mountain Travel.*

*Nepali Times brings you parts of a blog he wrote in 1997 called ‘The Himalayan Odyssey’ on the Mountain Travel Nepal website just before he died on 1 November 1997 in Pokhara.*

I came out to India and joined the old British Indian Army at the end of 1936. I joined the army partly because I as unqualified for any more intellectual employment, but mainly because I wanted to climb in the Himalaya – not just one expedition, but a whole lifetime of mountaineering and exploration. It worked. And even if the highest places were to be denied to me, I have no regrets. Fate dealt me a number of good cards and if I did not always play them properly, that was my fault.

At that time the whole of the Himalaya Karakoram lay open like a vast and fascinating book. But until about 1948, visits to Kathmandu were by invitation only, either from the Rana rulers or the British Embassy. The rest of the Kingdom was firmly closed to foreigners.

Now it is strange to think that then, to many, Pokhara exerted a greater fascination than Lhasa, and was certainly less known. Fourteen years were to pass before I set foot in Nepal myself and this long wait, and the magical pictures conjured up during the waiting years, must account for the fact that I have never quite lost my own sense of wonder and privilege of being allowed inside Nepal at all.

I try to remember that others may have a different attitude, but even so I feel my face beginning to flush when people argue that they should be allowed to enter certain border regions, restricted by the government for security reasons.

Until the war began at the end of 1939, possibly three of four expeditions used to come out from Europe or America each year. In the Indian Army we were allowed two or three months local leave each year, and nine months leave every three years. Annual leave was privilege and not a right and could be withheld or reduced by one’s commanding officer.

A new expedition to climb Everest from Tibet was being organised for the fall of 1940, and following Masherbrum. I was asked to join. Mostly it was a new team to replace those who had spent the last six years trudging to and from Darjeeling and the Rongbuk Glacier. A Captain Hunt was another of the members. It was an alluring prospect: just the right age and, first, home leave and three months getting fit in the Alps. I do not regret the war but wish they could have put it off for a couple of years.

The boredom, the sheer and utter misery of war and the few moments of truth which make it sometimes seem worthwhile compare very closely with high altitude climbing. I feel great admiration for the young men who voluntarily, without any clarion call from king and Country, endure similar miseries on high and steep mountain faces. Maybe it’s not quite as dangerous as war, and maybe



MOUNTAIN TRAVEL NEPAL

television provides the call, but never mind, I admire them.

## Finally, Nepal

In 1949, the Himalayan Committee of the Royal Geographical Society and the Alpine Club applied to the Nepal Government for Everest. This was refused, but Tilman and Peter Lloyd were permitted to visit Langtang Valley, north of Kathmandu. Once again, I wrote to Bill Tilman. Same result as in 1938. But in 1950 the Committee received permission to send an expedition to Annapurna, and at the same time the French were permitted to attempt Dhaulagiri. Now, it was Tilman’s turn to write to me.

There were four of us climbers in addition to our leader who was 20 years older and by far the strongest and fittest. It was an ill-organised and badly led expedition, which made its Base Camp above the Manang Valley the day the monsoon began and then failed to reach even the summit of lowly Annapurna IV. Personally I was relieved when superficially frostbitten feet put an end to my own climbing and I was able to spend the rest of the monsoon exploring the Manangbhot and Bhimtakothi valleys and collecting birds for the British Museum.

At the end, too, came a special reward when I walked across with one Sherpa to Pokhara and entered my private Mecca. Poor Pokhara has taken a bit of hammering in the 43 years which have passed, but I have not changed the opinion I formed then, there is no other mountain view in the world to equal Machapuchare and Annapurna hanging there in the

sky above the green Pokhara plain.

Meanwhile Herzog and the French had failed on Dhaulagiri but climbed ‘our’ Annapurna. It was the first 8,000m peak to be climbed and the subsequent flag waving and publicity were a curtain-raiser to even greater events in 1953 and the even more vigorous waving of flags.

I went to Everest that year myself, only as a sort of poor relation, a purveyor of oxygen loads. However, I was glad to go in any capacity and, although not particularly generous by nature, I have never questioned the fairness of the selection of the team. Success was however by no means certain and I knew that in the event of failure there would be another attempt after the monsoon. It seemed reasonable to suppose that some members might be killed, frostbitten or at least become tired and that replacements would be needed in the fall.

So dumping my oxygen loads at Base Camp I went off to prove myself, made the first exploration of the Lumding, Inuku and Hongu valleys, the first ascent of Mera and a south-to-north crossing of Amphu Lapcha pass in basketball boots – two firsts in one. Alas, all to no avail. Hastening back to my Regiment in Malaya, I heard the news one hot night in June from Indian policemen who were searching my rucksack in Jainagar on the Nepal border. And I rejoiced with the rest of the world.

## Nepal mountaineering

A wind blows across the highest mountains of Asia and rattles the tiles of the roofs of the houses in the valleys below. Doors swing open and others slam shut. This,

too, is a land of uneasy frontiers and political winds blow across the frontiers and open and close doors.

Now, Nepal began to open the doors of her mountains to foreigners, while those in other parts of the Himalayas began to close. Tibet became the first to be difficult to access, and soon impossible. Relations between India and China became strained, and finally reached the breaking point of war in 1962.

India and Pakistan fought in Kashmir. During those years, which continued in effect until the early 1970’s Pakistan sometimes permitted the entry of a few expeditions to such mountain as Nanga Parbat. But apart from Nepal, the remainder of the Himalayan Range from Bhutan to Kashmir, remained firmly closed to foreign expeditions. Nepal closed her own mountain for three years from 1966 to 1968 in sympathy with trans-Himalayan tensions prevailing at the time.

The years from 1950 to 1965 were the golden age of climbing and exploration in Nepal. Permits were of course required, but there were no restrictions, as after 1969, on particulars peaks, which might or might not be attempted. Most of the highest peaks were climbed during these years but yet there were never too many expeditions in the field at one time.

Generally speaking, the expeditions were not too large and publicity and ballyhoo remained at a low level. After 1969 the flood gates opened, although the Japanese expeditions devalued Nepal mountaineering for a time to the status of a football league. In 1976, the doors of India and Pakistan

eased open once again (mainly for economic reasons) and we now have a situation, not so different to that I have described 43 years ago, plus the bonus of Nepal. However, the permit system is now far stricter and more complicated.

After 1953 I continued to return to Nepal from army services in Malaya almost yearly, to the detriment of my military career. In 1954 I climbed Putha Hiunchuli (23,800 feet) with one Sherpa and this remains my humble personal height record.

Machapuchare followed in 1957, Noyce and Cox reaching a point about 50 meters below the north summit in the latter year. In 1960 Annapurna II was the last 26,000 footer to fall, Grant, Bonington and Ang Nima being the summit trio. In 1962 and 1965 I scraped around the flanks of Dhaulagiri VI, mistaking it for Dhaulagiri IV.

Like Machapuchare, ‘D4’ was an old ambition but proved even more difficult to grasp than the proverbial Fish Tail itself. Meanwhile, in 1958, fate dealt me one more card, an ace this time, and this gives me the opportunity gradually to switch the theme of my story from expeditionary mountaineering to trekking and the origins of Mountain Travel.

Towards the end of 1958 I was appointed to the newly created post of Military Attaché at the British Embassy in Kathmandu, and I have lived in Nepal ever since. In those days the Embassy staffs was very small and so, at first, it was paradoxically more difficult to get away than it had been before.

However from now on I was at the centre of the Nepalese mountain scene, and the 1960 expedition to Annapurna II was fitted into this period. The appointment was for three years and rather weakly I managed to have this extended by another two, I say ‘weakly’ as I had already decided to retire from the army and to devote myself full time to mountains.

Now I was merely opting for another two years of security and good army pay. But again fate intervened and this time dealt me a joker in the shape of an Army Brigadier (we don’t call them Generals in the British Army) who turned up in Kathmandu on leave. Unfortunately (fortunately) I took a dislike to his face and was unwise (wise) enough to tell him so rather late one night in the Yak & Yeti bar in the Royal Hotel. Rather unfairly – for he had no official standing in Nepal – he later reported me for “insulting” him. No, I was not court-martialled or sacked, but the two year Embassy extension was cancelled and I took the hint and retired voluntarily.

At the same time I also did two other things. I wrote to Norman Dyhrenfurth and volunteered my service for the American Mount Everest Expedition planned for 1963. And I went to see my friend the Director of Tourism and discussed some ideas with him.

I shall always be grateful to Norman for allowing me to join A.M.E.E.1963. It gave me both immediate object to work for and, afterwards a sense of partnership in probably the most outstanding feat yet performed on Everest barring the first ascent. I refer, of course, to the Unsoeld/Hornbein climb of the West Ride and subsequent traverse of the mountain although I would accord almost equal honour to the diminutive Japanese housewife Junko Tabei who later reached the summit with a single Sherpa companion in 1975.

In 1971, and again in 1972, I returned to Everest in a more exalted capacity than





Col Jimmy Roberts training Mountain Travel guides in cooking hygiene and food presentation, and with his dog in Pokhara in 1984.

the 'transportation officer' of 1963. However, a disability now prevented me from going beyond base camp, and that is no place for a leader or his deputy to remain.

The International Expedition of 1971 is probably remembered mainly for the walkout of the four so-called 'Latins'. I protest against concentrating all our efforts on a South West face climb. In fact, the seeds of failure had already been sown when a spell of appalling weather followed the quite unnecessary death of a well-loved Indian member.

The expedition was if anything strengthened by the departure of the dissidents (three of whom were in any case probably somewhat too elderly for very high altitude work) only to be decimated by an outbreak of apparently infectious fever. Despite all this, we did not do too badly and my main regret was the loss of a childish and innocent personal belief that mountaineers of a certain calibre and reputation must also be gentlemen (to use an outmoded expression).

After the expedition had failed the mutual personal abuse and accusation which broke out among some of the members (and not only the Latins) was quite extraordinary and continued for over two years. At the same time, encouraged by the press, some normally well respected on-looking Himalayan pundits were unable to resist the heady satisfaction of having a personal cut at the expedition corpse. However, to return now to more pleasant and important matters.

#### Trekking in Nepal

After A.M.E.E. 1963 I decided to remain in Nepal and create my own means of employment there. The field of 'mountains' obviously suggested itself – indeed I had few other qualifications. But within that field my credentials were good – long standing knowledge of the country, the people and their language, and more recently some familiarity with official circles in the capital.

I thought back to earlier days in Kashmir, and agents who used to help organise the forays of my sheep hunting friends, providing all camp gear, staff, porters, and food for an agreed daily rate. However, their methods and equipment were heavy and old fashioned – army tents, sheets and blankets, camp cots and camp furniture, and china cups and plates. There was also the consideration that these agents catered mostly for seasoned travellers who spoke the local language and who remained in full control of their caravans.

At this stage I should mention the terms trek and trekking etc, which are now very commonly used and understood but were novel to some in 1964 I think. The derivation is from an old Boer word

but the terms were so often used in Himalayan literature in connection with mountain camping and travel and so on that I never had any doubt that the beast forming in my mind would be called a Trekking Agency.

It would be based on what I had already seen in Kashmir, but streamlined and modified by lessons learnt in expeditionary mountaineering. And as the clients or trekkers would not be experienced in Nepal conditions, we would have to maintain a greater degree of control, which would necessitate a high standard of trekking staff and their training.

Beginnings were modest. I remember sketching out a plan to provide for no less than 8 trekkers in the field at any one time. I would have 8 pads, 8 this and 8 that. I wrote down 8 tents, scratched out the 8 and wrote 4. "Let 'em share," I said to myself. I placed a small but expensive advertisement in Holiday Magazine which produced five replies, two obviously from curious children.

One lady wrote 'Mount Everest... here we go again get out the Entero-Vioform... Rush me details.' With dollar signs beckoning at me, I duly rushed. But alas, silence prevailed. Perhaps she could not read my writing – Mountain Travel owned no typewriter in those days. By now, towards the end of 1964 it was however registered with the government as the first trekking agency in Nepal, and it was to remain the only one for the next four years.

My first clients came to do an Everest trek in the early spring of 1965. There as a story in circulation a year or two later that these were

"three American grandmothers", and a more sporting trio of enthusiastic and appreciative ladies I have never since handled.

Even by 1966 the days of the 8 sets of equipment were long past and I soon had to begin considering the problem of "how big"? In order to preserve the exclusive quality of the mountain experience I wondered if I should not turn people away. But the demand grew and grew, and now there were other Agents coming into the field.

Turning people away would not reduce the numbers coming to trek, so it seemed better to expand and at least try and ensure that the good name created for trekking in Nepal did not suffer. With expansion there was the danger of losing the personal touch which is vital in an operation of this sort. However, by selection, by training, by example and influence, and the delegation of responsibility, it may become possible for a special spirit to permeate an organisation, down to the humblest Sherpa 'Kitchen Boy'. This I hope we may have achieved in Mountain Travel.

There was, too, the question of approach, of what we were trying to achieve, to aim behind the way a trek was conducted. Stated simply, I would say we are trying to show you the mountains of Nepal, its valleys and villages and people, under the best possible conditions, but without shielding you from reality.

One hears criticism of groups who trek through Nepal isolated from the people and country by their own entourage and disinterest. That is not, I hope, our way of running a trek. Rather we try and give you all the ingredients of

enjoyment, with Sherpas who look after you but do not intrude. The final, total experience remains yours to create, and to enjoy to full without organisational worries or distractions.

I have attempted, somewhat awkwardly I fear, to express something of the philosophy which lies behind the name Mountain Travel, as I feel that this should be shared with those who come to trek with us in Nepal. Now I must say something about our Sherpas as this is quite a special relationship. We have all heard that the Sherpas are splendid fellows. And we have heard that they have been 'spoilt' (by expeditions, trekking, tourism or education – take your choice).

Probably the truth lies somewhere in between. As in any community, there are 'bad' ones, and the wages and other rewards now became customary for mountaineering and trekking work are high by Nepal standards. However, the good ones – there are many – are very good indeed and reply their wages many times over with willing work, loyalty and comradeship.

On an expedition or a trek, they served superbly but without any trace of servility. Sherpas give trekking agents in Nepal a most unfair advantage over their counterparts in other parts of the Himalaya. I cannot hide the truth – I love them. And at times they drive me stark, raving mad.

The year 1966, when Mountain Travel was beginning to give a fair amount of employment to Sherpas, also marked the end of mountaineering expedition activity for three years. Khumbu was already suffering from the economic effects of the near closure of the once profitable trade with Tibet, and this new source of employment, then and swelling steadily in coming years, was a godsend to Sherpa people.

Now it is all taken for granted and tends to rate less honourably than the aid (hospitals, schools and bridges) given to the Sherpa community by an outside source. However, someone had to start it all – and what trekking gave the earlier years have not been forgotten in the villages, which lies at the foot of Mt Everest.

What of the future? The growth of wilderness travel in Nepal during the past years has been phenomenal. The foreign exchange earnings from trekking have been considerable and more important, converted into rupees these earnings – in the form of Sherpas' and pay, food purchases and so on – have reached people in remote mountain areas, not just a few pockets in Kathmandu. The facilities which have been developed in Nepal have enabled people, who never dreamt

that it would be possible, to enjoy an expeditionary type holiday in the Himalayas.

India and Pakistan have not been slow to realise the economic advantage of thus utilising their own Himalayan assets, and have opened hitherto restricted area to foreigners, despite the fact that the security situation in those areas has not materially changed. On the debit side, in Nepal we hear of dirty camp sites and trails littered with rubbish (the legacy of mountaineering expeditions as much as trekkers) and crowds of hikers invading the peace of the mountain. The now widespread realisation that the first problem does really exist, amounts at least to a partial solution.

Thank you for following my rather long and rambling story so far. My time, indeed my life, has been mountain travel in the Himalayas in all its aspects. Wherever you can yourself follow, in Nepal or elsewhere, you will not be disappointed.

#### Postscript

The text above was written up to 1987, when about 40,000 trekking permits were issued. Five years later, the latest figures available, being for 1992, 71,439 were issued. That is about 20% of the visitors total for that year, but trekkers spend considerably longer in Nepal than normal visitors, so the income from trekking and mountaineering probably accounts for at least half of the grand yearly total of foreign exchange by tourism.

The years since 1965 have been something of a success story for this aspect of tourism in Nepal, which has spread to the rest of the world. Nepal did not invent hotels or aeroplanes but it did invent trekking tourism as we know it today. Even in its now somewhat degraded form it has brought benefits to many sections of the community and to the national economy, and it has enabled thousands of foreign visitor to explore the more inaccessible parts of this beautiful Kingdom. But despite the statistics, the industry is not all that healthy – for much longer than these last 5 years we have been engaged in strangling the goose, golden eggs and all.

In 1992, of then total 71,439 trekkers, 40,808 made their own private arrangements not employing one of the official trekking agencies. This implies they lived comparatively cheaply in shanty like 'tea houses', which are often unsanitary and allowed to spring up, unchecked, on former beauty spots. And so the trails grow overcrowded and dirty and even properly organised groups say "Nepal is finished".

This situation is especially acute on the more popular routes of the Annapurna region which played host to 60% of the overall trekking total in 1992, the majority being do-it-yourself trekkers. One cannot blame the latter for doing what they wish to do, but the trouble is that they are spoiling the experience, and the country, for others and contributing comparatively little to the national economy.

There are now over 200 trekking agents officially authorised in Nepal and it is doubtful more than 100 of these make a proper living from their agencies. Small wonder then that some agencies may try and balance their accounts by petty dishonesties. Such as underpaying their load carrying porters. This particular subject has recently roused the anger of a well-known British mountaineer, himself now in the business.

The fault really lies with the employer, who should not fall for the lowest offer, and the fact that an Agency bears the nametag of a "Cooperative" carries no special guarantee of superior services. 🇳🇵

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A Royal Nepal Airlines DC-3 in Pokhara Airfield in 1967.

MEL GOLDMAN





Students at Ghami Solar School in Mustang district posing with teachers after classes resume. Upper Mustang has not had any cases of Covid-19.

RAJU BISTA

# Some schools re-open in remote rural Nepal

Teachers and parents see no sense keeping schools closed when there is little or no Covid-19 spread

Alisha Sijapati

It has been six months since students and teachers all over Nepal have not had classes, but schools in remote rural Nepal with few or no Covid-19 cases are beginning to re-open.

After being closed for nearly half-a-year, rural municipalities have decided to resume school with an 'alternative education model' from 17 September, the day the government also allowed long-distance buses and further relaxation of lockdown rules in some districts.

Upper Mustang's Lo-Gekar Rural Municipality resumed classes on Thursday since there have been no Covid-19 cases reported in this trans-Himalayan region of Nepal.

"I think we have had enough of this closure, we need life to get back to normal, and especially the children need to be back in classes," said Lo-Gekar municipality chair Raju Bista.

Children in Upper Mustang have long winter breaks due to severe winters, so if the school had remained closed for another month, most children would have lost a full year of classes.

However, the biggest hurdle at the moment for schools all over Mustang district is the massive landslide at Rupse which has blocked the Kali Gandaki Highway



A school in Dhading performed a 'dress rehearsal' to resume classes adhering to Covid-19 protocols.

OMASTHARI

for the past two months. It is not likely to be opened soon. This means it will take time for students and teachers who had gone away to return.

But that has not deterred Wangdu Lama, principal of the Ghami Solar School to start classes for students who have remained behind. The school has 65 boarders from surrounding villages, and Lama says adequate precautions are being taken to ensure distancing and mask-wearing.

"Schools are where children are supposed to be," says Lama. "We used to have four children per bench, now we will have only two. Classes will last from nine to four, and we will teach only three subjects English, Maths and Science for now because the other teachers are away."

Across the Thorong La pass in

Manang, classes also resumed on 17 September. The remote district has had only four Covid-19 cases, and all have recovered. At this time, the scenic valley would have been preparing for the autumn trekking season, but the trails have been empty for most of 2020.

"We had to call guardians to tell them classes are resuming, and that we will be taking all precautions about the virus," said Lokendra Ghale, chair of Chame Rural Municipality.

In western Nepal's Achham district, a joint meeting of school officials and health care workers of the remote Mellekh Rural Municipality decided that it would be safe to re-open schools with proper preventive measures even though the town had 138 Covid-cases, initially brought by returning workers from India.

"We have not had any new cases now for 20 days, so we decided it was safe to partially re-open schools from next week with just one grade per day," explained Municipality Chair Lok Bahadur Bohara. "We have to compensate for all the months of classes that students here have lost."

Mellekh alone has 43 schools scattered across the mountains, and officials there have kept a close tab on the number of new cases and developed an effective contact tracing and home isolation strategy.

Even in areas with higher Covid-19 caseloads like Baglung district, some schools are re-opening. The Wadigad Rural Municipality is taking the government's directive of developing an alternative education model with an uncommon approach: community learning.

Principal Dhalmani Bhandari of Tribhuvan Secondary School says his classrooms have been turned into a quarantine centre with 19 active cases, so his students are assigned to 15 alternative education centres scattered across the municipality. To avoid crowding, each will have two shifts: 10am to 1pm and afternoon 2pm to 5pm.

"Education is a basic right, and we cannot deprive our students from it," Bhandari said. "We are using television and radio for distance learning, but for other students who do not have access to those devices, we are using the community learning method."

Wadigad had 47 Covid-19 patients, and Bhandari is frustrated with the Ministry of Education in Kathmandu not allowing local governments to decide whether it is safe to re-open schools or not.

"The government cannot have a blanket ban on classes all over Nepal. In places with few or no Covid cases, schools should re-open with all necessary precautions," says Shanta Dixit, director of Rato Bangala Foundation, which supports rural schools with training and teaching material.

Students are being told about wearing masks, covering the mouth while coughing or sneezing, washing hands with soap, and health experts say these will also prevent the spread of non-coronavirus infections like tuberculosis, measles, typhoid and diarrhea.

Municipality Chair Raju Bista of Lo-Gekar in Mustang says that most families cannot afford to buy disposable masks every day for their children or spend on sanitisers, so the school is propagating cloth masks and handwashing.