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Declare a health emergency

Two weeks to go to Dasain, a feckless government and careless citizens are dragging Nepal headlong into a health emergency.

Even as the total confirmed cases near the 100,000 milestone, and fatalities near 600, cross-sections of the public are ignoring the pandemic. It must be a combination of Nepal's famous fatalism, bravado, and ignorance about the need for health precautions.

Nationwide, there are now about 10,000 PCRs being conducted daily, of which an average of 2,000 people test positive – more than half in Kathmandu Valley. Public health experts say an estimated 30% of the Valley's population are already carriers, which means the

asymptomatic are spreading the virus around.

On Thursday, Nepal recorded its highest number of positive cases on a single day with 4,364, out of which 2,540 were in Kathmandu Valley alone. Twelve people died in the past 24 hours, bringing the total fatalities to 590.

Even though the total infected in Nepal has exceeded China, the number of fatalities in Nepal is ten times lower than China. While the global fatality rate is 3%, in Nepal it is still hovering at 0.6%

However, it is also true that the government has squandered seven months in political one-upmanship, in kickback driven procurement of emergency equipment, and with incompetent flip-flopping on Covid-19 policy.

There was plenty of time to ramp up contact tracing, mass testing, expand ICU capacity where population density is

highest. But the various agencies under the Ministry of Health did not coordinate implementation, and sat around passing blame when things got worse.

Kathmandu Valley now has two-thirds of the total confirmed cases, making it not just the capital of Nepal, but also the capital of Covid-19 in Nepal. The government has not just refused to learn lessons from around the world, it has not even learnt from the experience of districts like Parsa which used to be a hotspot, but now has the disease under control. Kathmandu Valley will soon need 1,000 ICU beds, and 100 with ventilator support. We need at least ten exclusively Covid-19 hospitals.

Just like the White House in Washington DC, Prime Minister K P Oli's official residence in Baluwatar has also become a hotbed for the virus. Three of Oli's

Govinda KC and the Right To Life

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Kathmandu hospitals strain to cope

BY SONIA AWALE
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advisers, his personal secretary and doctors, security guards have all tested positive. Obviously, protocols were not maintained.

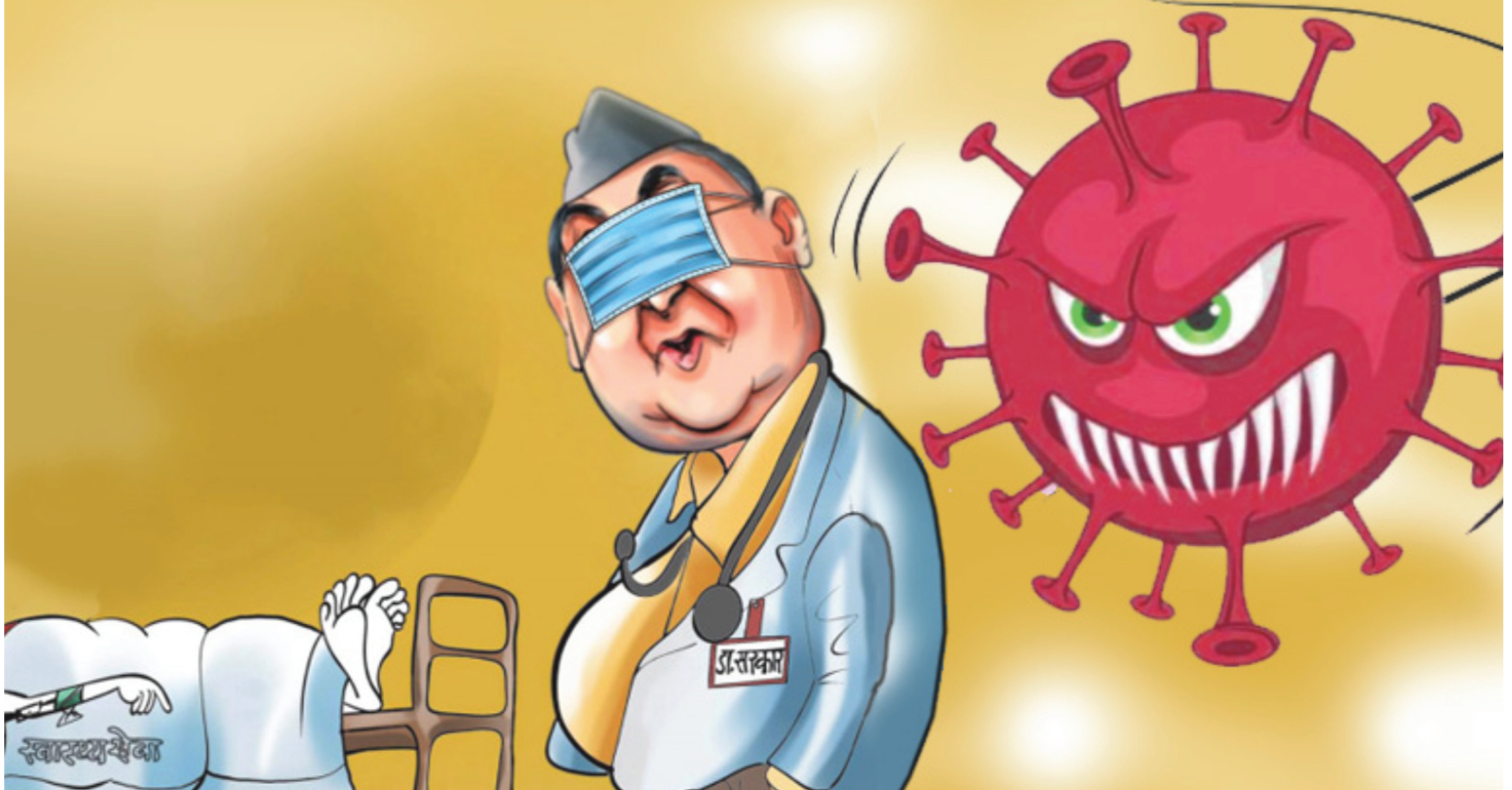
What kind of message is the prime minister sending to the public when he attends party secretariat and Cabinet meetings, does not self-isolate and there is no contact tracing, especially of those within Baluwatar.

The Dasain-Tihar-Chhat festivals are around the corner with clan get togethers and travels that

they entail. Right after that we go into the winter flu season with worsening air pollution.

The government should declare a National Health Emergency to manage existing health facilities, equipment and personnel. Citizens must be made aware of the need to keep distance and not undertake unnecessary travel. Otherwise, Nepal is looking at an explosive situation this winter. 🇳🇵

Shekhar Kharel



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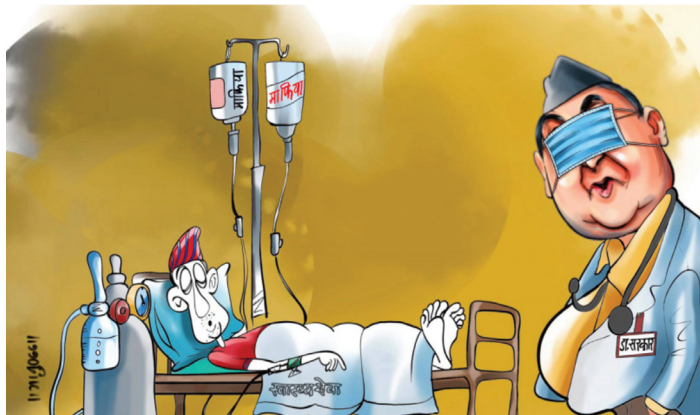
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Govinda KC and the Right to Life

"How thirsty he must be. I hope his fast will end soon," said Govinda KC's mother on a video that was shared online this week. Her sentiment is shared by all Nepalis who have followed the good doctor's fight to bring public health and medical education within reach of the disenfranchised.

Govinda KC, in his 19th fast-unto-death, has repeatedly suspended his satyagraha after



BHANU BHATTARAI

assurances were received from successive governments. This time, he seems to be in no mood to go by mere commitment. He wants action on the ground.

Govinda KC is beyond a concerned Nepali citizen, with deep commitment built on decades of experience. He is an internationalist who has travelled on his own money to Pakistan, Indonesia, Burma and Haiti when disaster has struck, be it a tsunami, cyclones or earthquakes. At a moment's notice, when there is a crisis anywhere in the country, he is on a night bus, traveling like the people, with a tiny shoulder bag to serve those in distress.

Indeed, it does not behoove those who have not shown his level of dedication to the poor to have a holier-than-thou opinion on his fast. At the very least, before they pronounce judgement on the appropriateness of his hunger strikes, they have to ask whether the issues he has raised are appropriate or not.

The good news is that so many of Govinda KC's demands have been fulfilled by the government or are in the process of being addressed. Even this would not have been possible had he not kept up the pressure on governments.

With his many hunger strikes, Govinda KC's body has taken a beating. With every fast, he has become weaker, and there is no doubt that on the 25th day of this hunger strike, his life is in clear and present danger.

This is the longest that any government

has waited without even forming a negotiating team to talk to Govinda KC. On the one hand, it shows the sheer arrogance of the government led by Prime Minister K P Oli, whose well-known distaste for decision-making on the basis of populist pressure seems to have got the better of his sense of empathy, humanity and good sense.

Oli should understand that KC's campaign is the best thing that could have happened

in terms of the goals of the new Constitution of Nepal, which guarantees the people's right to life and right to health. Indeed, we do not see what else could be more 'socialism oriented' (as the Constitution describes Nepali society) than efforts to make health and medical support available to the people at large.

It was only on the 23rd day that the government, with the Prime Minister's okay, sent a representative

to meet with KC, in the person of Education Secretary Gopi Mainali. As the public clamour for governmental response continued, the government named Mainali as the head of a three-member bureaucrats' team for talks. Promptly, KC

formed his own team led by Jiwan Kshetri, a pathologist and opinion-maker.

Govinda KC's many demands have been whittled down to six key points he wants the government to complete. One of them is a medical college to be established immediately in Karnali Province, as part of his demand for a government-run teaching hospital in each province. He also wants an amendment to the Health Profession Education Act, and for appointments to the Institute of Medicine (Teaching Hospital) to be made on the basis of seniority, to obviate politicisation of a key institution in the medical universe of the country.

We do not feel that the government team will have difficulty agreeing to conditions set by KC's team, and they should agree so that KC will give up his fast and get started on what is bound to be a slow recovery. Further, the government team as well as the Prime Minister's Office should ensure that there are no delays in the implementation process, which would ensure KC starting another hunger strike.

For now, all we can do is salute Govinda KC for his commitment to the people's right to life and right to health.

It is his breadth of experience and depth of commitment to Nepal's under-served that drives his sacrifice

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

20 years ago in the #13 edition of *Nepali Times*, Binod Bhattarai reported on the auction of the first mobile telephone license in the country. Six companies were pre-qualified for the final round of bidding: among them are joint ventures with one Turkish, one Singaporean, and four Indian partners. That was a time when Nepali still used land lines and pagers.

Hemlata Rai investigated the problems at Kathmandu airport with monkeys on the runway. Two decades later, Kathmandu airport has finally got a much awaited facelift, but the problems of mismanagement and congestion remain.

The paper also profiled French filmmaker Eric Valli who directed Nepal's first ever Oscar-nominated film for best foreign language film, *Caravan*. It lost to Pedro Almodovar's *All About My Mother*. The Nepal-French entry has since gained a cult status in the Nepali film fraternity. Excerpts:

Upwardly mobile: The auction is straightforward—there is theoretically no chance for underhand deals by ministers and no backroom negotiations. This also means consumers don't pay for political corruption and commissions on equipment supplies, all of which are usually passed on to consumers and contribute to unnaturally high tariffs and other inefficiencies.

All eyes are on the NTA auction. How properly it is handled will be seen as a pointer to future privatisation schemes of the entire telecom sector. Licensing of mobile telephone service using the GSM-900 technology is part of the government's efforts to privatise and deregulate service sectors.

The minimum the bidders can quote for the licence is Rs20 million and the minimum for renewal after 10 years is Rs18 million. (The licence



can be renewed for a total of 25 years.)

"Airport closed, monkeys on the runway.": To be sure, the bird danger at Kathmandu airport is real. And the reasons for that have little to do with airport management. When an overcrowded, dirty city is encroaching on the airport perimeter, when the whole Valley is a garbage dump, when the entrails and femurs of water buffaloes sacrificed during Dasain litter the runway threshold, there is no point blaming the airport.

The equipment is state-of-the-art. All-glass cockpits, fly-by-wire airliners, 50-km radius radar surveillance, but the state-of-the-airport is 19th century: perimeter fences with large gaping holes, shortcuts for humans to cross the runway, uniformed guards with airguns, and a management record that reflects the country's sorry state.

Life after Caravan: Eric Valli grew up as a cabinet-maker in France, and was never formally trained in anything. "No one taught me to be a photographer, a director, or a cameraman. Basically I am a story-teller," he says. "And I have found that a feature film is the best way to re-create reality."

His latest work with Debra Kellner is the photo-essay of Rana Tharu on the September cover of National Geographic magazine. A book version called *Jungle Princess* will be released in April 2001. Valli first shot to fame with his dramatic story of the Gurung honey-hunters of the Annapurnas which was printed in National Geographic. Valli has other projects up his sleeves, but he is secretive about them.

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

ONLINE PACKAGES



THE KITE RUNNER

Watch Kathmandu get ready for the Dasain kite-flying season. After years of steady decline, kites staged a comeback this year because of the Covid-19 lockdowns and families confined to their homes took to roof terraces to fly kites. Story: page 8-9.

CONSERVATION HEROES

Wonderful account -- at Lincoln University we have had the great pleasure of being inspired by the memory of Mingma Norbu Sherpa, in particular, and the young scholars that join us each year on the scholarship that bears his name ('Remembering Nepal's conservation heroes', Ghana Gurung, #1030). Their passion for Nepal and conservation have become a part of the fabric of our university family, strengthening permanent international links New Zealand shares with Nepal.

Hamish Rennie

• What an inspiring account of the heroes who were taken away and of those who have remained to lift their torch and have went on to achieve wonderful new achievements. This inspirational story needs to go places, particularly at a difficult time like this.

Ashoke Chatterjee

BAGMATI POLLUTION

I want to see Bagmati completely cleaned up ('How the Bagmati Civilisation is becoming uncivilised,' Rajani Maharjan and Madison Wrobley, #1030). But it's not up to any government any more, it's up to us. Our planet has reached the current stage of degradation due to governance failure across the world, their inability to act on environmental issues and climate change. We still have time to restore it and protect our health.

Grace Greenland

• Bagmati's pollution is beyond imagination and extremely depressing.

Ranjana Mamgain Bakshi

• Those were the days. Plenty farmland throughout the valley. Beautiful rivers. Freak street in it's day day. Walking everywhere through the city.

David Bruce

GOVINDA KC

Good work, *Nepali Times* for publishing this excellent article ('KC's fast highlights Nepal's Covid-19 failure', Ramu Sapkota, #1030).

Sam Cowan

WOMEN AND DISASTERS

When I was stationed in Panchkhal during monsoon last year, the nearby hills of Sindupalchok often reported news of landslides ('Why more women die in Nepal's natural disasters', Tufan Neupane, nepalitimes.com). Most casualties were always women and children. Their long sarees got stuck on things, rocks and branches. It wasn't the easiest to run in. Women there, as seen during my site inspections were rarely equipped with appropriate footwear, kids and infants were always trapped inside their houses with sub par strength, specially during bad weather. It's high time a gendered lens is brought to climate change and the environment.

Anoushka Pandey

AGRO AID

This is very sad for the vast majority of Nepalis ('Aid rarely aids agriculture in Nepal', Ramesh Kumar, nepalitimes.com). Specific direction of funds in any of these projects would result in quicker and successful conclusions, as opposed to going through the "old channels" where everyone takes a slice of cash for themselves with resulting delays.

Alan Roadnight

WALKABOUT WITH ANIL

Please do not stop making these videos. I've learned so much and I hope every other Nepali does too. Best wishes to Anil Chitrakar and *Nepali Times*.

Dash ADV

TAX ON ELECTRIC CARS

Not enough. Should be Zero carbon=Zero tax. Nepal can utilise its potential in hydropower to cut fossil fuel import.

Sirkey Sirkey

• Electric cars should be tax free, only then everyone will buy them. But can we be sure there will be a constant electricity supply?

Karen Ale

• Why was it raised and why is it reduced now? Raises eyebrows. Definitely not because of public outcry, is it?

Sagar Gurung

• We Nepalis should rethink about taxation on automobiles on a whole.

Sonny Mani

Times.com WHAT'S TRENDING

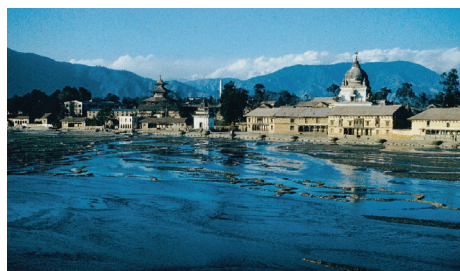


Hiking in the Himalaya during Covid-19?

Nepal is to re-open for trekking from 17 October, but some mountain districts are sealing themselves off. Visit nepalitimes.com for details.



Most reached and shared on Facebook



Uncivilised Bagmati Civilisation

by Rajani Maharjan and Madison Wrobley

Pollution of the Bagmati has affected rituals that used to take place along its banks. But what happens to the Bagmati Civilisation when its people can no longer bear to stand on the banks of their sacred river? Food for thought in this week's longread on our website.



Most popular on Twitter



Remembering Nepal's conservation heroes

by Ghana Gurung

WWF Nepal country director pens a personal account of the tragic deaths on 23 September 2006 of Nepal's top conservation specialists, and how a new generation of Nepali conservationists was inspired by their pioneering work.



Most commented



Nepal's women envoys make a mark

by Pratistha Rijal

Nepal's women ambassadors rise to the occasion: they have shown that they are as good as, if not better than, their male colleagues in ensuring the welfare of Nepalis abroad during Covid-19 crisis as well as projecting the country's international image. Don't miss the most popular story of the week, read it online.



Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Nepali women find it difficult to maneuver in the labyrinths of a male-dominated government machinery, which is often run like an old boys' club. Five of #Nepal's 25 currently serving ambassadors are women.



Krishna Joshi @krishna_joshi01
Not only women, men suffer like too in the male dominated labyrinth of Govt machinery. This machinery does not discriminate-it treats everyone, regardless of gender, with the same amount of extreme indifference & apathy.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
37 people were killed when a landslide on 12 July tore through the settlement of Lidi of Sindupalchok district. More than half of them were women. @tufanjee on why more women die in #Nepal's natural disasters



Mukesh Poudel @poudelmuk
Many males going abroad to earn make a higher proportion of females living in rural villages. It could also explain the disproportionate death of women in natural disasters in Nepal.



Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Free visa and tickets for #Nepal's overseas workers sounds great in principle, but it has remained just that: a principle. Read @upasanakhadka's detailed reportage on the theory & practice of zero-cost migration.



KYU Yeti @KyuYeti
We have never tried it for real to know, but I would imagine it would be very good in principle and great in reality. Just a haunch.

Nepali Times

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The elephant dilemma

By following the sound science, Nepal could lead Asia in tourism best practice

In the depths of central India the red rocks hung heavy in the dry April heat. The guide Bimal led us along the marked trail and tangled thorns through the prehistoric caves, solicitous that we admired the ancient paintings, the oldest rock art in India, preserved by UNESCO in the remote archaeological world heritage site of Bhimbetka. Our footsteps on the



SO FAR SO GOOD
Lisa Choegy

hot packed earth echoed with the silence of far-distant ancestors.

Occupied in Palaeolithic and Mesolithic times through to the historic period, the shimmering walls of Bhimbetka rock shelters were alive with drawings of stylised animals, ritual dancers and horseback hunters pursuing herds that had roamed up to 10,000 years ago, offering a rare glimpse into the earliest traces of life in India. Amongst the bulls, buffaloes, deer, antelope, a peacock, a tiger and the left handprint of a small child, my attention was immediately caught by the tusked elephant with people perched on his back.

“I used to live with elephants in the Tarai jungles – have you been to Nepal?” I asked Bimal, to explain my enthusiasm. “Not yet,” came the elliptical reply.

Rather like Covid-19, the complex conundrum surrounding the rights and wrongs of keeping captive elephants can be led by solid science and good sense, or it gets blinded in a whirlwind of rumour and innuendo. Whatever we may think today, the red wall art of Bhimbetka reminds us that elephants are embedded deep within the South Asian cultural psyche, a rapport built over many millennia.

Brought up in England amongst dogs, horses and a deep concern for animal welfare, arriving in 1970s Chitwan I was captivated by the Tiger Tops *hatisar*, bustling with *phanits*, *pachhuwas*, *mahouts*, wives, children and a dozen elephants, each with their individual character, personality and foibles. I observed the symbiotic bond with their skilled handlers, their sometimes feisty relationships with each other, and the delight that these clever creatures brought to decades of jungle visitors. Interactions with patient pachyderms were undoubtedly a highpoint of tourist visits to the Tarai national parks of Nepal.

A primal affinity with the jungle pervades the senses as I sway soundlessly through the park landscape behind an expert *phanit*, a grey trunk delicately investigates the timeless scents and sounds, and a low gurgle communicates with her neighbours nearby. Sangjay’s first spoken word was *hati*, Rinchen was only four when the Enigma elephant music video hit the charts, and soon after I arrived in Chitwan my life was saved from an irate rhinoceros by Rup Kali, and her driver Sultana. As well as being a perfect wildlife-viewing vehicle on which to explore tiger country’s towering grasslands in safety, elephant walks in the forest, bathing in the river, and elephant camp visits to learn their husbandry, habits and friendships were highlights for Tiger Tops guests.

These days, it is ironic that this elephantine ability to inspire sentiment and strong feeling is threatening their future, and even



NATURAL MOBILITY: Blending into their natural habitat, elephants are a perfect vehicle on which to explore tiger country’s towering grasslands in safety and without disturbing the wildlife

DHRUV SINGH

their very survival. Provoked by animal rights activists and fundraisers, a morass of misinformation, anthropomorphism and simplistic soundbites are shamelessly manipulating this emotion to convince the world that it is cruel to keep elephants in captivity.

Well-meaning western tour operators are succumbing to media pressure, refusing to sell lodges or itineraries that offer elephant activities. Losing tourists would be the worst outcome for Nepal’s elephants with potentially tragic consequences – their welfare is dependent on sustainable tourism and visitor demand, and is specially fragile due to the ongoing coronavirus downturn.

There is doubtless appalling abuse in parts of Nepal, and particularly in other Asian destinations where negligent authorities allow elephants to be taken from the wild, despite legislation prohibiting this, and some animals are cruelly trained, badly neglected, illegally trafficked or otherwise subjected to the misery of mistreatment. Are we not obligated to treat all animals with kindness and respect – farmed, tamed, trained, captive or wild – not just elephants?

Over 200 domesticated elephants are scattered through Nepal, mostly in the Tarai living adjacent to their natural habitat around Chitwan and Bardia National Parks. About half are in private hands for tourism (106 private elephants reported by WWF Nepal), with 94 owned by the government and eight by NTNC where they are essential for conservation research, census, monitoring, translocation, rescue, anti-poaching patrols and reaching otherwise inaccessible areas, especially during the monsoon. Private lodge elephants are often used to supplement DNPWC’s important wildlife protection work, contributing to Nepal’s enviable record of conservation success.

None of Nepal’s elephants are used for logging or expected to work in alien environments such as temples, forts, beaches, city streets and urban hotels — all far less-humane activities than jungle safaris in their natural habitat. The worst that happens is the occasional royal coronation or ceremonial procession in Kathmandu, now that hunting is over. Since 1986 the pachyderm’s wild cousins are protected as

endangered species, no elephants have been captured from the wild in Nepal since the mid-nineteenth century, and our habitual training techniques mostly employ kindness and positive reinforcement rather than brute force.

It is expensive to manage any elephant camp, requiring space, shelter, supplementary food, veterinary attention, and substantial numbers of staff and their families – three persons tended each animal at Tiger Tops, mostly indigenous lowland people honoured for their generations of traditional knowledge and elephant experience.

Baby elephants born in captivity take years to grow and also keep their mothers out of commission – some calves are sired by wild bulls from accidental mating. Well planned and responsible jungle tourism in the elephant’s natural environment is the best benign option for sustaining their expensive existence, ensuring they are valued, kindly treated and venerated as Ganesh, integral to Hindu heritage and subcontinental culture.

Boycotting the use of elephants for tourism comes with the danger of having the very opposite effect desired by well-meaning proponents. Naïve calls to set elephants free back into the wild are not a realistic option due to lack of suitable habitat, exacerbation of conflict with humans, disruption to wild populations, risks of spreading disease, legal obstacles and limited alternative livelihoods for the local communities who depend on them for jobs.

The idealistic dream of

eliminating conventional tools utilised for control and safety for centuries, such as ankle chains and *ankush* (metal hooks), can be lethal for both handlers and tourists if not approached carefully. Elephants are highly intelligent animals with a developed social structure, so building herds and friendship groups is technical and skilled, and corrals can result in elephants fighting, becoming stressed, bullied and even less happy than when confined in a regular *hatisar*.

According to science, neither is there any moral high ground to be gained by not riding elephants. Studies show that rides are not necessarily a problem provided they are done the right way, in the right terrain and with the right professional care. Elephant treatment must be based on science and experience, not on emotion and sentiment.

Ongoing studies by teams of scientists in South East Asian countries, where many of the welfare violations take place, have come up with best practice guidelines and a set of criteria to ensure management benchmarking that benefit both elephants and their stable staff. These can be adapted for Nepal.

We need to distinguish our differences and separate our reputation from problematic issues elsewhere. Without too many changes, checks and upgrades with the cooperation of current elephant owners, Nepal could be leading the world in elephant best practice.

Instead of a blanket ban, succumbing to pressure from

uninformed rights’ campaigners and confused media, introducing a certification system to monitor ethical standards throughout Nepal elephant camps could improve animal welfare and human wellbeing, and help rescue Nepal’s flagging nature tourism.

Without being apologetic or defensive, Nepal’s elephant practices can gain the trust of tour operators and consumers with external auditing to attain model conditions of animal care, without jeopardising the safety of our elephants, their carers or wildlife tourists.

Since my long-ago life in the jungle, a slew of zoologists, ecologists and a substantial body of research have been devoted to the issue of domesticated elephants. Their work overlaps to help protect the endangered 50,000 wild elephants remaining in Asia, of which Nepal has relatively few. The recent DNPWC count recorded only 227 *jungly hatis* resident in Nepal (Ram & Acharya 2020) in isolated populations along the southern border – not many more than the 208 elephants employed in conservation and tourism.

The Asian Captive Elephant Working Group (ACEWG) is a task force established in 2015 comprising some of the world’s foremost elephant specialists, scientists, conservationists, and camp managers from the Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute, Think Elephants International, Elephant Care International and GTAEF run by John Roberts, who cut his teeth working with elephants in Chitwan.

John is a leading authority, fighting for humane treatment based in Thailand at the Golden Triangle Asian Elephant Foundation (GTAEF). “If the working hours are limited and the terrain is suitable, two people in a saddle (less than ten percent of the elephant’s body weight) will not be an undue stressor for an elephant,” John Roberts reports. “The weight of one or two people without a saddle (less than four percent of body weight) would hardly be noticed.”

Dr Ingrid Suter presents a persuasive argument having spent her career interviewing mahouts and working with elephant owners. “Private elephant ownership is here to stay ... let’s be sure harm is minimised and ideally eradicated,” she says. As part of Asian Captive Elephants Standards she applies ‘scientific quantifiable evidence and expert findings rather than emotion or trends or pressure’.

Best practice certification schemes to win the confidence of the tourism industry have been developed by organisations that include Travelife for Tour Operators, ElefantAsia and Global Spirit, Animals in Tourism with support from IUCN, PATA and WWF.

If we fail to convince the international travel industry of our ethical standards, and if the Chitwan and Bardia elephants cannot support themselves with responsible jungle tourism, we are condemning these giants and their dependent local families to worse conditions and an uncertain future. And we would be depriving visitors of a wonderful opportunity to experience Nepal’s spectacular wildlife from the vantage of elephant back, which in turn supports vital conservation work, and promotes education, awareness and protection for the wealth of species and biodiversity in our beautiful protected areas. 🐘



LONG MEMORY: Since my long-ago life in the jungle, here in the elephant camp in 1974, a slew of zoologists, ecologists and a substantial body of research have been devoted to elephants.

Moving forward to live pink

Survivor recounts her struggle in a new book to be released during Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Three years ago, I set aside my fears and opened up about my experiences to the world. I wrote a commentary in *Nepali Times* titled 'Let's Talk About Boobs'. Three years later, so much has changed. Yet, so much remains the same.



COMMENT

Suvekchya Ghimire

This October, during Breast Cancer Awareness Month, my main message is still the same: I want to spread the right information, share knowledge, and change perceptions about the disease. I want my message to be one of hope rather than a continuation of the negative stigma associated with cancer.

Cancer is not something that happens to a specific demographic. It does not only happen to people of a particular gender or age group. It is also not something that is entirely linked to lifestyle choices, or ways of living. Cancer can happen to anyone, and at any time. Like it happened to me — a then 32 year-old-woman in the prime of her life with no family history of the disease.

We need to bear in mind that cancer is on the rise in Nepal and around the world. There is no denying it. But here is what is truly important: early diagnosis is a lifesaver. It is why I am still here. It is why so many others like me — and many more who are not like me — are still here.

The big question so many people have is, "How can we tell that it is cancer?" The answer is simple: "Get to know your body."

Apart from the obvious side effects, getting to know your body is the most important part of self-diagnosis. If you are not familiar with your own body, how could you possibly know if anything is wrong with it?

Feeling, cupping, and truly looking at your body on a regular basis are the best things you can do for yourself. Learn what is normal and what is not. Discover your body, talk about anything you feel may not be quite right. Shed the taboos that have been imposed by society or yourself. You do not need a superhero, you can save your own life.

Four years after my treatment, the pain has subsided, but the memory remains. When I first received my diagnosis, I thought my life was over. I was unaware of the details surrounding the disease, the treatment involved, what it would do to my body, and how my mind and spirit would be affected.

The physical struggle was a nightmare. There's no sugar-coating that fact. But there was more to it



than that. I noticed changes that were more intense: changes that no one could see from the outside.

I put pen to paper to process the crazy ups and downs in this chapter of my life. Writing became the only true and honest outlet for emotions I was not yet ready to share.

My treatment cycle took over eight months. The recovery process took even longer. While undergoing chemotherapy and radiation, I had a reason to wake up every morning. I had to get out of bed and make my way to those appointments.

It was not so much a choice as it was something that was "just done". This was my fighting phase. I had one goal: to beat cancer.

Once that phase was over, I needed to find my own motivation. I needed to find the fuel to get out of bed and to do something with my day. The aim during this time was to get better, to recover, regain strength,

and rid my body of the toxins that had built up within it. It was a long, slow process and I would be lying if I said it was easy.

Two long years later, my hair began to grow back and I started to recognise the person I saw in the mirror. I was starting to look more "normal", I was starting to look like my old self. But I did not feel like the old me.

I had lost a part of my body and because of this, I was unable to lead exactly the same life. Certain activities would forever be out of reach. After having my entire right breast muscle removed, I was unable to lift anything heavy or even straighten my arm above my head. Using chopsticks was almost impossible. Lifting a fork was more challenging than it should be. My new life was alien to me and as a result, I felt lonely.

No one truly understood the pain I felt, although they really did try. This made me feel even more alienated because they were normal and I was not. People often asked

what my plans were, what my next steps would be, what I wanted to do with my life. I had absolutely no clue. I was stuck in a state of limbo. Depression was my new foe.

I knew I had to do something. I was fortunate enough to attend a course offered by a local charity and cancer hospital. The course was called 'Moving Forward' and for me, it was just that. I met fellow survivors and learned that most people (around 80% or more) who face cancer are affected mentally once the treatment is over.

I was no longer alone. I had found my path to healing my mind, heart, and spirit. I was supported and understood in a way I never was before by people around me and also by myself.

It became more important than ever before for me to offer others that support. I wanted my experience to be both educational and a ray of hope. And I wanted to make sure that at least a few people would feel less alone than I did.

I realised that my book was more than just a therapy tool. Through my experience sharing, I had the opportunity to do something positive — to make an impact. The raw, honest scribbles I had collected during my treatment and recovery became the foundation for my book, *Cancer, Curry & Me*, which will be released on Amazon at the end of October 2020.

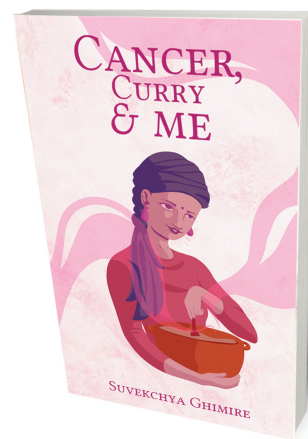
It is important to understand the changes around us, and inside of us. It takes a tremendous amount of energy and strength to get out of a chronic condition like cancer, both mentally and physically. When you are in the thick of it, it is too easy to get lost and not be able to find the 'support' you need. While the people around you may think you are coping (because that is what they see from the outside) you might still be breaking down inside. I know I was.

This year, my hair has grown longer and I look a lot like my old self. I have learned to remember and appreciate how each passing year has brought me a tremendous amount of new energy, opportunities, and greater things in life. It's this hope that I want to share with others.

Given the current global situation, it is only too easy for us to fall back into the darkness. The instability around us is a reminder of the difficulties we faced in the past and it threatens to take us back to that scary physical and emotional state.

This October, it is not only time to support various charities, or wear a pink ribbon, but it is also a time to eradicate that fear of cancer. Instead, it's time to develop a better understanding and support those who want to learn more.

Now is the time to appreciate those who have had cancer, to think of them, and to celebrate their journey. It is time to live pink. 🇳🇵



Cancer, Curry & Me
by Suvekchya Ghimire

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BIKRAM RAI

As virus spreads, Kathmandu hospitals strain to cope

Despite ample warning, health facilities were not expanded to deal with Covid-19

Sonia Awale

Looking at the daily statistics from the Ministry of Health, the figures are alarming. Nepal is nearing the 100,000 Covid-19 cases mark, and this week the country overtook the total number of cases in China.

Kathmandu Valley has emerged as a major hotspot since August-September and now accounts for one-third of all Covid-19 deaths and over 61% of active cases nationwide.

This is a dramatic about-turn from July, when the Valley accounted for only 4% of all active cases in Nepal. But by August it was up to 15%, and 34% in September.

On Thursday Nepal recorded its highest number of positive cases on a single day with 4,364, out of which 2,540 were in Kathmandu Valley alone. Twelve people died in the past 24 hours, bringing the total fatalities to 590.

The number of active cases on Wednesday also crossed the 25,000 threshold, which the Ministry of Health had warned would overwhelm Nepal's health infrastructure and a lockdown may need to be re-imposed.

Currently, 235 patients are being treated in ICU and 42 are on ventilator support. Bagmati province has 128 patients in ICU and 30 on ventilators.

Nepal's health infrastructure is far from being overwhelmed by Covid-19 patients. There are an estimated 2,600 ICU beds in private and government hospitals nationwide, and of the 900 ventilators in hospitals 490 are in working order.

The problem is that there is uneven distribution of these facilities.

There are not enough ICU beds where they are needed most, and beds available in private hospitals tend to be unaffordable to most Nepalis.

The government's 25,000 threshold appears to be a deliberate strategy to convince people to adopt preventive measures to control the disease, since curative capacity is limited. In Wednesday's press briefing, the Ministry of Health did not say anything about a re-imposition of the lockdown.

Bir, Teaching, Teku and Patan are the only government-run hospitals in Kathmandu Valley admitting seriously ill Covid-19 patients, and their limited capacity is getting saturated. All 20 ICU beds in Teku are occupied, so are 10 beds in Bir Hospital, 20 in Teaching and 22 in Patan that are set aside for Covid-19 patients.

The Armed Police Force (APF) hospital also designated for Covid-19 care has a 20-bed ICU, but only half are in operation because of the lack of trained healthcare workers.

Some private hospitals in Kathmandu Valley like Star, MediCity, Grande, Norvic, HAMS and B&B also admit Covid-19 patients, but these are expensive and have only a part of their total beds designated as Covid-19 wards.

Because of the pandemic, many non-Covid-19 patients are not seeking treatment, and private hospitals are converting existing capacity to coronavirus wards to compensate for the loss of revenue.

For Samir Adhikari at the Ministry of Health, the limiting factor is not ICU beds but adequate supply of oxygen. He says: "Most patients do not need to be in ICU or have a ventilator, they need oxygen and it is much more critical to ensure that there are enough cylinders."

Adding to the problem is that patients without major complications have also occupied

ICU beds, there is a poor referral system, shortage of drugs, mismanagement of human resources and facilities.

Since June, more than 350 healthcare professionals have been trained by the National Health Training Centre in critical care, and are now working in various hospitals and institutions across the country, but not in ICU wards.

"We submitted the details of the trained professionals to the ministry and it is now their responsibility to deploy them where they are most needed," says director of the Centre, Yaduchandra Ghimire.

The Ministry of Health sent a budget to all government hospitals to repair ventilators, install ICU beds and oxygen generators. However, it does not look like this has been done.

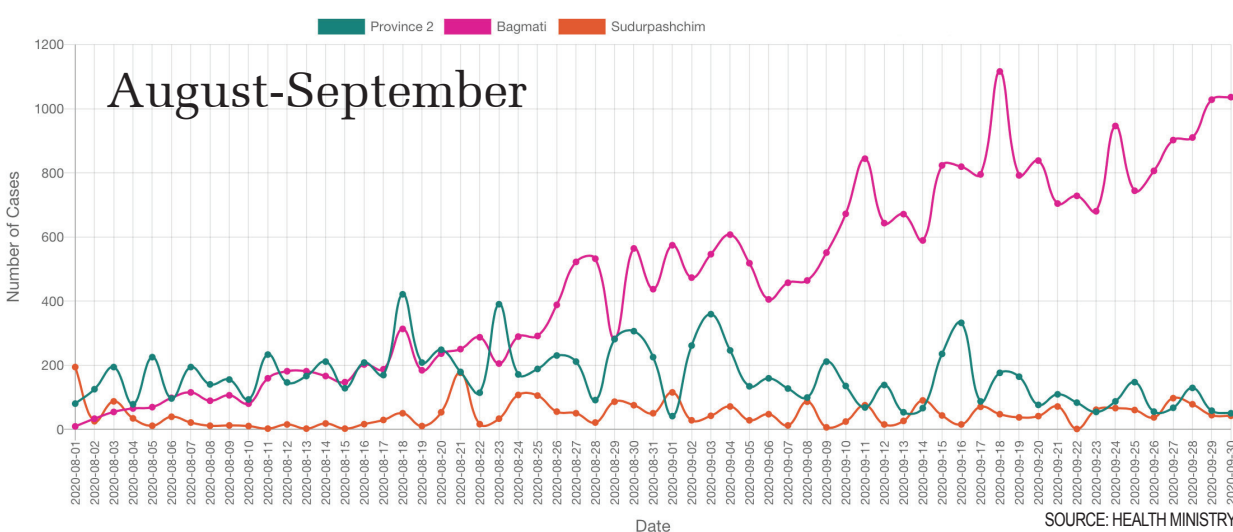
Director General of Health Services Dipendra Man Singh says: "We have to move fast. At the rate Covid-19 infection is spreading, it is becoming increasingly difficult for even Kathmandu to manage the treatment of infected patients."

This situation was not unexpected. Last month, the Nepal Society of Critical Care Medicine had suggested the Health Ministry to establish 500-bed medical college with 50-bed ICU for a possible surge in symptomatic patients.

"Infected people are now dying at home without treatment. The infrastructure needed to treat critically ill patients has not been managed due to the conflicting interest of the leadership at the health ministry," says one doctor affiliated with the group.

While Kathmandu Valley's hospital capacity is stretched, things have more or less settled down in Province 2 and Sudur Paschim Province that saw multiple peaks back in June-July (see graphs, below) following the return of migrant workers from India. Hospitals there were also overwhelmed then, but are now able to manage patients.

Additional reporting by Ramu Sapkota



prabhu BANK

Qatar honours teachers

Qatar Airways will give away 21,000 complimentary tickets to teachers on the occasion of World Teacher's Day to honour their work during the Covid-19 pandemic. Teachers can register for the offer at qatarairways.com/ThankYouTeachers by



submitting a form to receive a promotion code, offered on a first come, first served basis. Teachers that successfully register for the offer will receive one Economy Class return ticket to anywhere on Qatar Airways' flight path, as well as a voucher for 50 % off one future return ticket that they can use for themselves, a family member or a friend. The giveaway opened at 6:45am on 5 October and will close at 6:44am on 8 October.

Hyatt reopens

Hyatt Regency Kathmandu reopened on 1 October for limited services, and is following Covid-19 safety protocols. Hotel employees will undergo a wellness check



prior to each shift and will be required to wear masks while on the property. Guests are required to put on face masks or coverings and in outdoor spaces including the lobby, meetings and events spaces, and restaurants when physical distancing is not possible.

Ncell festival offer

Ncell has launched a festive campaign 'Kurai Kurama Upahar' for all prepaid subscribers who can win daily, weekly and

bumper prizes upon the use of certain assigned talk-time to make offline, online and international calls. Gifts range from a daily prize of bonus talk time to the Samsung Galaxy Note 20 bumper prize. Offer is valid until 28 November.



Sanima & Daraz Dasain

Sanima Bank has collaborated with online shopping portal Daraz for its Dasain Dhamaka scheme, which will offer the bank's debit and credit card users



discounts of 20% or up to Rs2,500 when they purchase goods on Daraz. Customers who shop on the platform will be given discounts on a first come first serve basis. Additionally, Sanima credit card users can get EMI services at affordable interest rates. The offer is valid until 18 October.

City Express lucky draw

City Express Money Transfer launched its festival promotional campaign 'Jaba City Express Cha Saatha ma, harek din 10000 haath ma', per which one person everyday can win Rs10,000 through a



lucky draw. All customers sending money through City Express from 1 October to 30 November will be able to participate in the campaign.

prabhu BANK



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EVENTS



#HerJourney

The third guest of Girls in Tech-Nepal's #HerJourney series will feature Bandana Sharma, Senior IT Manager and Information Security Officer at Nepal Bank. An expert in various programming languages and banking software, Sharma is a published author of research relating to inequality and issues faced by women in the workplace. Register for the event at <https://bit.ly/33qlltn>. 10 October 5pm-7pm

Boudha Market

Buy organic fruits and vegetables, fresh baked goods, and other delicious goodies. Support local products and farmers, and follow physical distancing guidelines. Every Saturday, 8-am-12pm, Utpala Cafe, Boudha, 9801978106



Bikalpa studio support

Bikalpa Art Centre has opened applications for a three month long studio support program for local young artists and fresh art university graduates. This program is designed to support young artists in studio work as well as their ongoing and upcoming projects. Visit the website to learn how to apply. Application deadline: 25 October

photo.circle grants

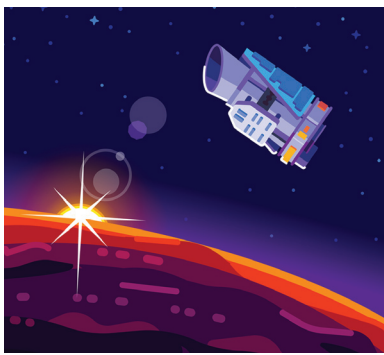
photo.circle has opened the third round of grants to support five Nepal-based Nepali photographers, journalists, and multimedia storytellers to document the Covid-19 pandemic. Grant recipients will receive support to publish content through Nepal Photo Project. Head to the website for details on how to apply. Application deadline: 11 October



Tulikaa exhibition

Tulikaa is a platform connecting artists, entrepreneurs, art enthusiasts and collectors in Nepal. Curated by Ujen Norbu Gurung, the upcoming exhibition at Dhokaima Cafe's Van Gogh Gallery will feature artist Aman Maharjan, who specialises in printmaking. 9-15 October, Dhokaima Cafe

ONLINE ARCHIVES



Kurzgesagt

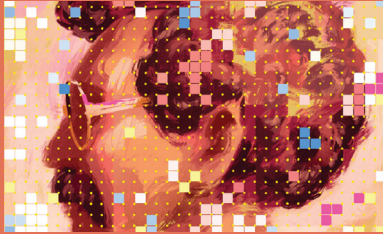
Kurzgesagt – In a Nutshell creates animated educational content on scientific, technological, political, philosophical and psychological subjects. If teachers, parents, or casual viewers are looking for creative educational material, head on to the Kurzgesagt YouTube channel.

Herne Katha

The web series shows untold stories of ordinary people in the form of short documentaries. Head on to their YouTube channel to start.

Invisibilia

A study of human behaviour, Invisibilia fuses narrative storytelling about the unseeable forces that shape our ideas, beliefs, and assumptions with science that will make you see your own life differently.



Virtual street festivals

Google's Colorful Street Fests & Carnivals is a virtual tour of eight of the most vibrant street festivals in the world. The celebrations include the La Tomatina food fight in Spain, Oktoberfest in Germany, and the Mardi Gras festival in New Orleans.

Global Digital Library

Looking to enhance children's vocabulary while schools remain shut? The Global Digital Library has educational material and storybooks for parents and educators classified according to reading levels, including books in Maithili, Nepali, and Newa languages.



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Going places together - qatarairways.com

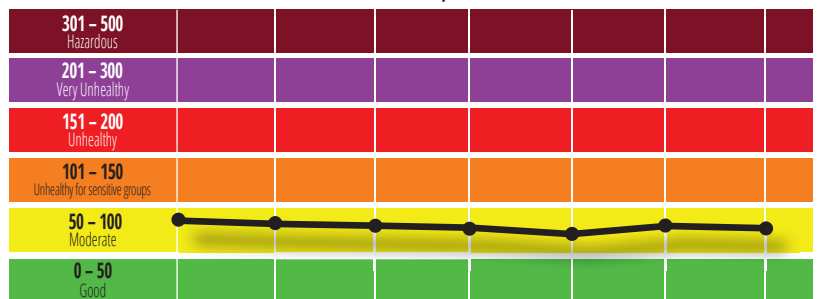


The monsoon has now withdrawn completely from Nepal's air space. There are no westerly disturbances or depressions in the vicinity which means a dry and bright weekend ahead for Kathmandu Valley. A trough over the Bay of Bengal has switched wind direction to northwest, which also means cleaner and cooler Dasain-like weather with fresh afternoon breeze perfect for kite-flying.

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

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 2 - 8 October



PM2.5

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY
October 2	October 3	October 4	October 5	October 6	October 7	October 8

Despite increased vehicular movement, the concentration of particulate matter smaller than 2.5 microns decreased slightly in Kathmandu's city centre compared to the week before. Daily average Air Quality Index (AQI) stayed in the yellow 'Moderate' zone throughout the week with clear bright skies and fresh westerly afternoon breeze blowing away the pollution. However, AQI is still in the harmful zone during the morning and evening peaks.

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

ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI

KRIPA JOSHI



If rainforests are the lungs of the planet, then wetlands are the lifeblood. Wetlands are found across the world, ranging from giant deltas and floodplains to swamps, marshes and peatland. This combination of land and water teem with biodiversity and provide homes for innumerable fishes, amphibians, birds and mammals. Wetlands also act as a "carbon sink" that stores greenhouse gases. Peat wetlands alone store more carbon than rainforests do. Wetlands are also like large, living water filters and help to clean our drinking water. They can protect us from flooding, tidal waves and storms. Unfortunately wetlands are often seen as wastelands or non-productive land so they are drained, filled in or destroyed. These habitats do not receive the same amount of attention as rainforests or coral reefs but are just as important for people and wildlife and they face the same risk of extinction. #FridaysForFuture

DINING



Achaar Ghar

Enjoy home-cooked meals along with various choices of pickles prepared using recipes passed down from generations. Try the lunch box or the khaja set. Go to Facebook for details about delivery options. (01) 5541952



Little Tibet

Indulge in piping hot bowls of noodles, dapa and mouth-watering Tibetan, Bhutanese and Nepali food. Get the Lowa Khatsa, Mustang Aloo, Sha Phale and more. Find the menu on Bhojideals and Foodmandu. (01) 4242656

Dhokaima Cafe

Take a break in a tranquil oasis of this courtyard at Patan Dhoka with physically separated tables and savour Chef Ale's latest pre-Dasain menu. Takeaways available. (01) 5522113

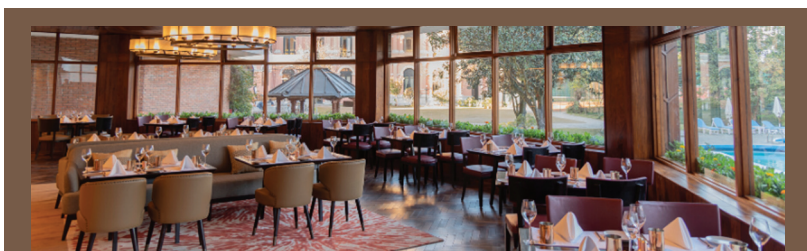
Buingal

With a variety of both vegetarian and non-vegetarian options, Buingal has something for everyone. Give the piro aloo and chicken sandeko a try. Check out the menu online. Maidevi (01) 4421393



Flat Iron Grill

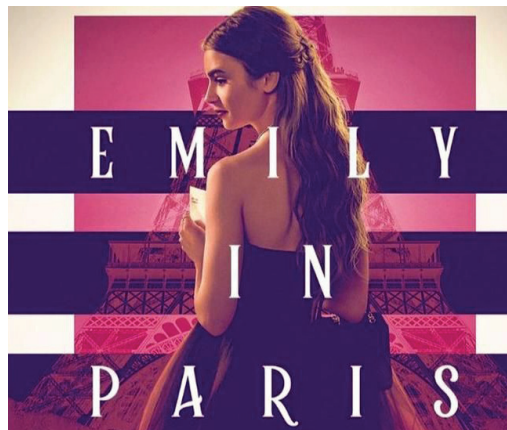
Although this eatery is known for sandwiches, the desserts deserve more recognition. From the cheesecakes to the eclairs, Flat Iron Grill offers the best of anything sweet. Go online, or call and get freshly baked goods, ham, sausages, and dairy products delivered. 9808200961, 9801007676



Spice Room

Hotel Yak and Yeti's Indian fine dining restaurant Spice Room has reopened with extensive Covid-19 safety and cleanliness protocols. Call ahead to make reservations. 5pm-10pm, Darbar Marg, 9801047533

OUR PICK



With hardly two months left for a brand new year 2021, *Emily in Paris* is the perfect silly romcom to binge-watch this Fall. Created by Darren Star of *Sex and the City* fame, this Netflix series has all the fun elements that will reinvigorate those bogged down by the Covid-19 pandemic. Lily Collins, Ashley Park, Philippine Leroy-Beaulieu and Lucas Bravo star in pivotal roles.

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

There are still descendants of professional hunters, but they may be the last generation

Kishor Maharjan in Western Nepal

It was bitterly cold up at 2,800m in a village in the mountains of western Nepal as rain fell, and the forested ridges above were covered in snow.

Chandu and Makar were waiting for the rain to stop, and night to fall. They are descendants of villagers whose profession was to hunt for game, and sell meat. It was seven days before the full moon, and perfect for night hunting because the moon was not so bright yet.

They were going to be out in the wilderness for a week at a time, and had to carry food to last the trip. They also lugged two long barreled muskets, gunpowder, locally made ammunition, and a ramrod to load the rifles.

Nepal's royalty was known for its elaborate hunting trips in Chitwan and the Tarai jungles, where they bagged hundreds of tigers, rhinos, leopards, bears and even crocodiles at one go. It was more of a leisure activity, and an attempt to play hunting diplomacy with high profile British visitors in India.

But for the past 50 years, hunting has been completely banned in Nepal – except for the Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve where trophy hunting of Himalayan tahr or ghoral is allowed. The license costs a hefty sum, but there are enough people around the world who can afford to fly in private jets all the way to Kathmandu, charter helicopters out to Dhorpatan.

Hunting used to be a legitimate profession in rural Nepal till recently, and unlike the royal hunts, there was no overkill. The country's forests in those days were teeming with pheasants, small mammals and deer, and the culling was important to keep the animal population in balance.

Chandu and Makar are descendants of these professional hunters, and they still cater to the demand for wild game in the districts, although they have to do it clandestinely now. Knowledge about hunting, prey habits, stalking skills have all been passed down from generation to generation.

But this is a dying breed, and Chandu and Makar are among very few hunters who secretly still carry the tradition in their village (which we cannot name), and they could



PHOTOS: KISHOR MAHARJAN

Carrying on the hunting legacy in Nepal

possibly be the last ones.

That afternoon, the phone rang. It was Chandu's father, and Chandu told him that since it was raining there was no point going up the mountains because of the shower and snow. His father told Chandu to stick to the plan, and the weather may actually favour animal sightings.

"How can you even call yourself a hunter? When I was your age, we used to go hunt even in the snow. Don't be a coward," his father's loud voice could be heard on his son's mobile.

As soon as he hung up, Chandu told Makar to get ready, and that they were moving out then and there. That night they stayed in a house up the ridge from the village. They tested their guns, but one of the muskets was not shooting properly. Instead of firing once with one big bang, it went "chhyat-tadyang-ga", as Chandu put it, imitating the sound it made. Eventually the musket was repaired, and the barrel cleaned. It was better than before, but still the gunshot sounded off every once in a while.

The journey from the hut



started early next morning before the sunrise to avoid detection. It was still dark and the path to the mountain forest was long and difficult with their destination at an altitude above 3,000m.

It is said that hunters make their own way, and it is true. There was no path. The undergrowth was so dense that thorns scratched the faces and hands. They had to stoop to avoid the lower branches, and sometimes crawl on all fours. They

went deeper and deeper into the forest, and the ridgeline came into view.

They were trying to move quietly, and Chandu suddenly stopped and signaled Makar to keep quiet and remain still. Slowly, he took off his backpack and lay it on the ground. Swiftly yet quietly, he took aim with his musket and fired. The sound reverberated through the forest, and echoed from the crags.

Chandu disappeared into the undergrowth in the direction of his shot. He reappeared a few moments later with a pheasant dangling from his hands. He closed his eyes, bowed his head and muttered a prayer for the life he had taken.

They stopped in a clearing further up, unpacked their bags and started to prepare lunch. It started raining, and they had three more hours to walk to the Odar overhang which would be their base camp for the next four days.

The rain turned to sleet and then snow as they climbed higher. The trail was now ankle deep in fresh snow. As darkness fell, they reached the overhang, the only shelter from the snow and wind on this mountain.

After settling down in the cave, the two hurried off to collect firewood as it was getting darker. This was not easy since the wood was all wet, but they came back carrying a dry log on their shoulders. This should burn all

night and keep them warm.

Night does not mean sleep for hunters. It is the time the nocturnal animals are out, and off the two went to stalk and find prey. They walked slowly not making a sound, but there no sign of any animals. Hungry and tired, they returned to the cave and started preparing dinner.

It took a long time for the fire to get going, but they managed it and melted some snow for water. Still the meal of rice and lentil took three hours because of the cold, and the altitude. The rice tasted a bit raw.

It was an extremely cold night. Chandu and Makar snuggled for warmth under a single sleeping bag beside the fire. They took turns to add wood to keep the fire burning throughout the night. By morning, there was no firewood left, and this was just the first of four nights.

Chandu had given Makar strict instructions not to speak in the jungle unless absolutely necessary. They would whisper, or whistle instead and remain as quiet as possible. They saw some deer and impeyan pheasants, but they were too far to shoot accurately. The old muskets did not have the range.

Chandu crouched towards his prey, hiding behind the thick undergrowth, to get closer. But no luck. The animals would either take flight, or simply disappear. He went into the surrounding forest several times a day, even at night with a torchlight pointing up at the branches, but always came back empty-handed. Hunting is like that, it is a matter of skill, training, patience, and lots of luck.

Chandu was getting worried that his luck had run out. He has been coming to these forests with his father ever since he was a child, and knows all the nooks where the animals like to hide. But even then there were days when they had to return empty-handed.

After five days in the jungle, they headed down to the village with just a pheasant to show for their effort. Makar was looking forward to going back to home food, and a warm bed. Chandu could not hide his disappointment because this was the first time he was returning empty handed. They returned exactly the way they had left, slipping into the village without anyone noticing the muskets they were carrying. 🇳🇵

This photo story was made during the International Storytelling Workshop 2020, hosted by photo.circle (Nepal) in collaboration with Oslo Metropolitan University (Norway), Pathshala South Asian Media Academy (Bangladesh), and VII Academy (USA).



Caste aside, Dalits battle stigma

Nepal's Dalits say ill-treatment and discrimination is worse among the educated in the city

Nunuta Rai



DURGA SOB
Politician

Durga Sob was born in Doti, and was sent by her family for higher studies in Kathmandu in 1980. She had faced caste discrimination in Nepal's culturally conservative far-west, they had thought educated and prosperous Kathmandu could be different.

How wrong she was.

In college picnics, at the student dormitory, in the classroom, Sob faced the same ostracisation and taunts of fellow students from the so-called 'upper' castes that she used to get in Doti.

She got a job at ActionAid even while at college, and in 1988 she met American rights activist Robin Morgan. They talked a lot about how Nepal's gender activism was not inclusive, and it left out women perceived to be of a 'lower' caste.

Morgan helped Sob set up her own group. Forty years later Sob is still running her Dalit Women's Organisation which by now has grown to become nationwide. Sob rented a flat in Kathmandu and kept two rooms as her office and two rooms to live in.

Soon, the landlady found out that Sob was a Biswakarma, from the Dalit community. The usually friendly woman became hostile, and gave Sob notice to move out immediately.

Sob went flat-hunting throughout Kathmandu without hiding her caste, since she did not want to face the same problem again. But that made it even more difficult for her to find an office and residence space to rent.

"I asked many people for help, no one came forward," Durga Sob recalls. "In the end, I lied about my caste and soon got a flat. But even then, they would find out and harass me by cutting off my water supply or electricity to drive me out. I have had to move so many times in Kathmandu because of my caste."

In 1995, Sob was invited to attend the Beijing International Women's Conference with other Nepali women activists. She had to share her hotel room in Beijing with a Nepali, but because she was a Dalit, none of the other conference participants from Nepal agreed to share a room with her.

"That was the worst day of my life, I wept," Sob remembers. "This was an international conference on women's rights, the Nepalis were gender activists, and yet this was happening."

In 2001, Durga Sob was nominated member secretary of the newly established National Dalit Commission. But the discrimination did not stop. She says: "Dalit women have to face double discrimination: first because they are women and second because they are Dalit."

Sob was convinced that the only way to resolve caste racism is through politics. So, she started becoming politically active, but even in politics she found prejudice against Dalits. First, she joined Baburam Bhattarai's Naya Shakti Party as a coordinator, hoping that its progressive agenda would help in her struggle.

"I got that position because of my ability, but I started feeling pressure, there was a feeling that a Dalit women should not have a leadership role. I should have been a deputy

chair or general secretary, but I was demoted to being a secretary," she says.

Durga Sob is now a central committee member of the People's Socialist Party, but she has no illusions about ever rising to a position higher than secretary. She concludes: "When racism is direct and open, we can resist it. But when it is hidden, it is difficult to endure and fight against."

YASH KUMAR
Singer

Yash Kumar's father was a Brahmin and his mother a Dalit. When he was 10 years old his parents brought him to Kathmandu from Sarlahi. He did not have to face racism while in the Tarai because he was quite young, and he was not discriminated against in Kathmandu because he had a Brahmin surname. However, when he was making his citizenship papers, he added 'Pariyar' to his formal name.

It was after he became a well-known singer and famous for a hit song about untouchability that Yash Kumar started really feeling societal discrimination. A sister of his best friend with the Brahmin surname 'Acharya' was getting married, and he came over to give Yash Kumar



an invitation card to the wedding. But he said the invitation was just for formality, and that he should not come to the reception.

"He told me he did not believe in untouchability but his parents did not want his Dalit friend to attend the wedding," he recalls. "It was like something pierced my heart."

Yash Kumar relates many other incidents where he faced ostracisation because of his caste. He would even hear friends cast derogatory remarks about Dalits either because they did not know he was one, or because they thought he was out of earshot.

One well-known film actress once confided to him: "You are different from other Dalits in the way you think and speak. You must be mixed."

Yash Kumar says he reacts immediately when someone mistreats him because he is a Dalit, but it is more difficult when the discrimination is subtle. "I feel really sad that there is such behaviour in a city where there are supposed to be educated and conscious people," he adds.

REKHA PARIYAR
Student leader

Unlike other Dalits who face direct and indirect prejudice, Rekha Pariyar has been physically assaulted because of her caste. After her family moved to Kathmandu from Chitwan, they started being treated differently by the neighbours. They could not draw water from the community tap, and were not allowed into the corner tea shop.

Rekha's father and brother had a tailoring shop. In 2012, they brought a sewing machine and other equipment in a rented pickup, but the driver asked for money more than was agreed upon. An altercation ensued, and the neighbours beat up members of her family, hurling racist slurs against them.

It took a long time for the police to arrive at the scene, and they took Rekha and her



their parties or festivals.

"I am a singer, and I pour out my anger in my songs, but this is Kathmandu, the message is restricted to the songs, it does not change too many people," Anuragi says.

SONA KHATIK
Radio Station Manager

Throughout her life, Sona Khatik grew up suffering from caste discrimination. Her life story indicates that caste stigma is more entrenched in the Tarai than in the mountains.

"I like to report from the field instead of dealing with people in the office," says Khatik who worked her way up from being an intern to the Station Manager of Community Radio Kapilvastu.

"Even so, I often notice people's attitude change after they find out I am a Dalit. They talk down at me," she says. "They ask me my caste and profession of my parents, and when they find out I am a Dalit they actually tell me I must be a non-Dalit because of my senior position."

In 2012, she had gone to interview a senior official at a government office. He did not even tell her to sit down in the sofa, she had to take the interview standing up. Because caste



injured family members to hospital where her father and mother had to spend three weeks. Police in Maharajganj refused to accept her complaint. Only after appealing to Prime Minister Sushil Koirala did the police register the case, but even though this became a high profile media story, the perpetrators were never caught.

Rekha Pariyar rose up the ranks of the student union, and used to deliver fiery speeches against caste discrimination. But her political colleagues would not eat with her, even though they travelled and did everything together.

She says: "It is even more difficult to fight discrimination when it is so entrenched in supposedly better educated people in the cities."

B B ANURAGI
Singer

Born in Baglung, BB Anuragi was at the receiving end of racial discrimination. But when he came to college in Pokhara, the ostracisation got much worse. He got into an argument and a fist-fight when fellow students wanted to keep him out of the student dormitory. But after that he could not rent a room anywhere. He finally found a room with



two other friends, but he had to move out when their parents were visiting.

He started singing at a local gazal restaurant, but had to move multiple times when landlords cut off his water supply or harassed him when they found out that he was a Dalit. There was a Newa landlady who had a room, and he told her he was a Dalit. But her reply surprised him: "It does not matter to me what caste you are as long as you are a decent person." She was an exception.

In 2003, Anuragi moved to Kathmandu, but here the discrimination was of a different nature than Pokhara. "In Kathmandu people did not bring up caste directly, but would insinuate things which was difficult to counter," he says.

Even to this day, he notices that people's demeanour changes completely when they find out he is a Dalit. Neighbours do everything together, but do not call him for

discrimination is now punishable by law, the prejudice is also more subtle.

One of Khatik's close friends eats with her, but when she is invited to her friend's house she has to eat outside the kitchen. "It really affects me when close friends do that," she says. "I just stopped going to her house."

Khatik says it is difficult to counter discrimination when it is so indirect. "We are invited to functions, but the organisers usually treat non-Dalits differently than Dalits. Often, they just ignore me. So, I have just stopped going to such functions. I counter indirect stigma with an indirect boycott."

HOLI NEPALI
Tourism entrepreneur

Nepali Dalits face discrimination even when they are abroad. And Holi, who runs Top of the World trekking agency in The Netherlands, has a direct experience of this. Nepali was born near Pokhara and through



the kindness of trekking agency operator Rajiv Shrestha she got a good education. She stayed with his family, so others did not treat her badly then.

When some people in Nepal used to ask her what her caste was, she would say she was from the leather worker ‘Sarki’ caste. They would reply: “You are so good looking even though you are a Sarki?”

She started working in Shrestha’s trekking agency where she met a Dutch national and got married to him, and started living in The Netherlands in 2012. But even there, caste discrimination has followed her.

Nepali has a Nepali Chhetri friend whose relatives admonish her for hobnobbing with a Sarki. During Nepali gatherings, she has heard many Nepalis advise others not to marry outside their caste groups.

“It seems that no matter how educated you are, no matter if Nepalis are in Europe, they cannot rise over bigotry,” she says.

SHANTI PASWAN
Activist

She was born and raised in a town in the Madhes and never had to face discrimination in her home town of Siraha. That may have been because she grew up in a Tamang majority neighbourhood.



However, after she became older and got involved in social service activities, she faced discrimination at every step.

In 2012, when she wanted to stand for

election to a school management committee she was forced to step down because of her caste. Her rivals thought she might win, so they threatened and intimidated her. “After it got nasty, I thought it was just not worth it,” she says.

Because it is illegal to openly discriminate against a Dalit, the educated ones pass snide remarks to put them down. “They will not say it directly, but if there is someone who is not good-looking or if there is an undesirable person around, they describe them as ‘being like a Dalit’. If there is a crime anywhere, it is a Dalit who is the first suspect,” Paswan says.

She has developed her unique way of dealing with such racism. “If it is someone who is just not aware or are illiterate, I let their slight go, but if it is someone who should know better, I come down hard on them.”

BHUWAN SINGH BISWAKARMA
Ex-soldier

He is one of the few Nepalis who has even been to Antarctica. Bhuwan Singh Biswakarma was born in Baglung but moved to India when he was 10, and later joined



the Indian Army. He joined an expedition to Antarctica, and says he was never treated different because he is a Dalit.

However, after retirement and return to Nepal he has been facing discrimination in his own homeland. “Earlier, even the educated people used to discriminate on the basis of caste, but now because it is illegal to do so,

there is a different more roundabout kind of discrimination,” he says.

Biswakarma says such indirect treatment manifests itself in friends who do everything together, but stay apart while eating. Once, he was drinking tea with a friend when he inadvertently touched his glass. The friend got up and left saying he did not feel like having tea that day.

“I always know they are doing it because of me, but how do I fight that?” asks Biswakarma who now lives in Butwal. “Close friends do not invite you for weddings and other parties at their home. It hurts.”

PURNA LAL BISWAKARMA
Engineer

Even if a Dalit is an engineer, he has to face discrimination. In fact, no matter what senior position they hold, even if they are rich, or hold high office, Dalits still face caste discrimination from a society that should



know better. Engineer Purna Lal Biswakarma is living proof of that.

Born in Kusma of Parbat district, Biswakarma grew up with other Dalits, and did not face stigma for being from a ‘lower’ caste. Even when he enrolled in an engineering college in Kathmandu, he did not really face much discrimination.

It was after he gave his Public Service Exam that he started facing the brunt of the injustice. After joining the Irrigation Department, he had to travel across Nepal. It was in Baitadi in far-western Nepal where he

had to face the worst treatment even from co-workers.

He still remembers the discrimination from a close friend and long-time colleague who was getting married. Everyone got an invitation but him. He was invited for a reception later, but did not go because the ill-treatment affected him deeply.

“They talk to you with respect, but as soon as they find out you are a Dalit, the tone changes completely,” Biswakarma says.

PURNA NEPALI
Professor

He was born in India and was raised in Kapilvastu where he faced ill treatment, abusive language and discrimination every step of the way while growing up. But it was



after he moved to Kathmandu that he had to face other kinds of poor behaviour. He joined the United Nations Gender Mainstreaming Project and was assigned to Myagdi where he faced caste violence from his own colleagues. They did not drink water from a bottle that he had touched. “They never said anything bad, but their behaviour was appalling,” Nepali remembers. “It affected me deeply at a psychological level.”

In 2008, he had gone to Bajhang and Doti for research into his PhD and it was difficult to get a room for the night. “Dalits did not have room, and non-Dalits would not give you one,” he remembers. “There have to be stricter laws against caste discrimination, and they need to be enforced. The only way to reduce this racism is through a zero tolerance policy.”

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Kite fight over Kathmandu

As the Dasain festival approaches, the pandemic sees a surge in Nepal’s kite warriors

Alisha Sijapati

The monsoon has retreated, there is a fresh westerly afternoon breeze, the sky is blue, the mountains are out again. Nepal’s kite-flying season is here.

There was a time when the sky in Dasain used to be filled with colourful kites as almost every rooftop in Kathmandu Valley would be flying kites. First it was movies on cable tv, then came mobile phones and the Internet, people were too distracted to fly kites anymore.

This year, though, because of the spread of Covid-19 in Kathmandu, families are confined to their homes and the kites are back. The roof terraces are once more filled with children, and even adults, conducting test flights for the Dasain jamboree.

In Kalimati, Mohan Manandhar, along with his father, brother and son run a small kite shop that has been in the family for generations. But sales went down, as kite flying went out of vogue.

“We thought of shutting the shop for good, but it is surprising that this year probably because of the lockdown, there is renewed demand for kites, *lattai* reels and thread,” Manandhar says. “The business is back.”

History of kite-flying

Kites were invented 2,400 years ago, and came to China from Bali. They were used by the Chinese general Han Hsien in 170BC to measure distances and it was probably Marco Polo who took kite technology to Europe, just like he took Chinese noodles and called it pasta.

Marconi used a kite to lift an antenna for his first trans-Atlantic radio transmission from Newfoundland to Ireland. Benjamin Franklin made a static electricity experiment flying a kite during a thunderstorm. Avid kite flyers like the editor of this paper have flown kites at 5,800m at Makalu Base Camp in winds gusting up to 60 knots. (The kite survived because the air is so thin.)

Kites that fight

Whereas European and Chinese

kites float lazily in the sky waving their long tails, in Nepal kite flying is a martial art. Here, a kite has to fight. The idea is to cut the enemy’s thread with your line. Which means the kite has to be able to flit in and out, be obedient and have a killer instinct.

The thread has to look threatening, with red *majha* armour so it can slice through the adversary’s threat. It is the *lattai* that gives a kite the capacity to reel in or out, and here speed is of the essence. A user’s airmanship is determined by proficiency in the use of *lattai*, and whether it can steer the kite left, right or up and down. Can the kite climb for a deadly dive, can it ride the wind so that the line can be used like a khukri?

Since the idea is to down enemy kites, you need every advantage you can get. Strong home-made *majha* made of snail slime or starch and powdered glass helps. It is the glass that gives the thread its sharp edge, but unless the thread is pulled fast by the kite, it will not be able to slice the enemy’s line.

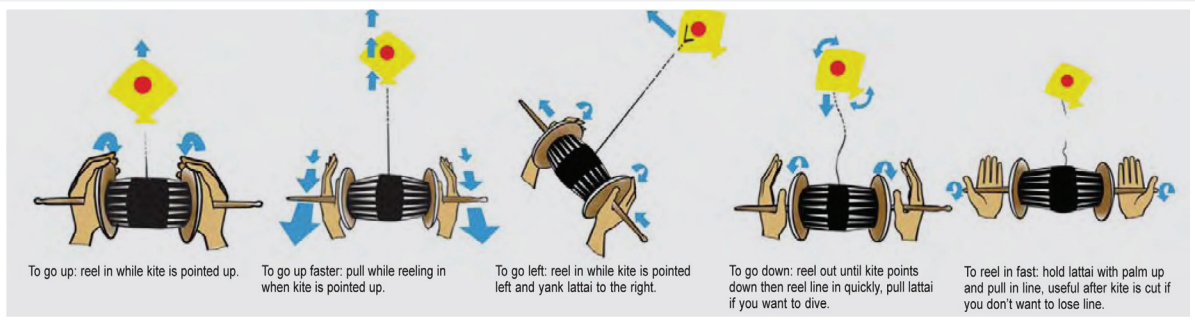
Once the adversary kite is cut and is adrift, it is mandatory for the flight crew to emit a blood-curdling scream, “Chaiiiiiit”, and then let the triumphant kite perform elaborate victory rolls.

Every neighbourhood has its own Top Gun, the kite aces with dozens of kills daily in ruthless dogfights. Then there are the vanquished, drifting unguided in the breeze trailing long untethered strings.

Types of kites

Traditionally, Nepali kites were made of hand-made lokta paper. They were heavy and took a stiff breeze to get air borne, and are rare now. But once up, they behaved like lumbering bombers – unlike latter day ‘Lucknow’ kites which were made of lighter paper and are more maneuverable. Although they do not come from Lucknow anymore, these versatile and fast kites are the Spitfires of the air.

The skills of Kathmandu’s kite warriors are passed down from generation to generation. Kite cadets learn to gauge the breeze, its direction and velocity. The take-off is the trickiest part, the timing has to be just right as you let it go in a tumbling motion riding on a gust of



Kite glossary

Majha: line armour

Mandali: stone on string used to prey on low-fliers

Kakaa: string at point where it is tied to kite

Phuin: show-off kite aerobatics

Tthini: launching kite by co-pilot

Lappa: stall

Hi-chait: cut kite

Gwankh: paperweight to give kite lateral balance

Ghumaure: kite that tumbles when reeled out

Tiktike: sluggish side-by-side movement of kite

Chakchake: kite with attention deficit disorder

Tauke: kite with pattern on top quadrant

Babache: kite with bottom half of a different colour

Dariwal: kite with symmetrical pattern on bottom left and right

Dhark: kite with stripes

Puchhare: kite with tail

Lattai: thread reel

wind. Tumbling (*ghumaure*) makes the kite reel out faster than a side-by-side (*italicise*) motion.

Kite tricks

Here is a military secret: if you are engaging another kite in a dogfight, the idea is to use altitude to your advantage by reeling in. When the enemy kite is below you, dive and reel out when the lines meet. The velocity of the line and its friction is what cuts the other fellow’s string. So, don’t ever reel in after the strings have made contact. Even the most lethal *majha* may not save you.

The thing to remember is that reeling out makes the kite lose altitude, while reeling in makes it climb. But there is a caveat – reeling in while the kite is pointing down

makes it dive. Similarly, pulling the *lattai* hard will make the kite zoom to whichever direction it is pointed at. An experienced pilot will pull while reeling in, to give extra traction.

The way a kite behaves in the sky indicates the experience of the pilot. You can tell that a tiktike is flown by a novice, a *puchhare* is probably a kid, the flashy Red Baron is a show-off who will sooner or later get himself shot down, the Darting Diver is probably flown by a dare-devil who will eventually get stuck on a tree, the High Hoverer is a deceptively calm but can turn into a ruthless falcon to dive suddenly and cut the enemy’s umbilical before he can utter “*gwankh*” (the weight you add to a kite for lateral balance).

Aerodynamics of kites

A kite is a heavier-than-air object and logically should fall under the influence of gravity. But it doesn’t. The reason is that it is an air-foil, and its flight is defined by aerodynamics and Bernoulli’s principle.

Unlike the wings of aeroplanes, sails, bird wings and parachutes, kites can alter or redirect the flow of air around it unevenly so as to create pressure differences. While putting the kite in the air, the angle of the kite diverts the flow of air unevenly over it. This causes the air passing over the kite to move faster than the air passing under.

At this point, according to Bernoulli’s Principle, the faster a current of air moves, the lower its pressure becomes. And, as any physics student will tell you, there is thus a high-pressure build-up below the kite which gives it lift. Gravity tends to pull the kite down, while the lift makes the kite float.

When the kite is in equilibrium, four forces-gravity, lift, resistance (drag) from the wind, and the

tension of the kite line-cancel out. Drag tends to push the kite horizontally back while the kite line pulls the kite forward. This state keeps kite in steady position.

There are some *lato changa*, or lazy kites which respond only when stronger force is applied through the line. This is caused by the low lift-to-drag ratio. If the drag is greater than the lift, the kite will not fly at all.

On a keen breeze, a kite will be at equilibrium and easy to control. When the wind dies down, the kite stalls. But even here, quick *lattai* action can keep a kite aloft. But there is a penalty: you will have to sacrifice line length. Pulling at the string with a *lattai* raised above the head is the trademark Nepali way of flying a kite in light breeze.

There are various traditional ways to steer a kite. To take the kite left, for example, wait for the kite to point left and give the *lattai* a yank pulling it on the right side of your body. Ditto if you want to go down or up. While reeling loose the *lattai*, the kite often rotates, and you have to be careful not to reel in while the nose is pointed down this could put it in an uncontrolled dive. Also remember to allow for delay for the kite to respond to your command, and this delay is always directly proportional to the tension on the line. So, if your line is tight the kite responds immediately, if it is sagging it is sluggish.

Because of the congested urban space, the Nepali roof-top kite flyers are sometimes compelled to yank the *lattai* to coax their kite up. But field kite flyers have the advantage of a long runway for a kite’s takeoff and get it higher after the launch for it to catch a passing breeze. 🏠



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