



KUNDA DIXIT

Upended Dasain

Besides language and shared history, the glue that binds the Nepali world is Dasain. It has traditionally been that joyous time of year when the harvests are in, the clouds part, and icy peaks reappear behind forested ridgelines.

It is the time for people to go home to their home districts, emptying out Kathmandu, and for the diaspora to return to the motherland. It is a time of renewal and hope. Dasain is the season Nepalis can briefly take their minds off problems, of which there are many. A recent public opinion survey showed that Nepalis continue to worry most about jobs, inflation, health care, education for their children, and crumbling infrastructure.

Strangely, they do not complain about the government, perhaps because they do not

expect anything from it. They have stopped grumbling about corruption because that is the way it is. Politicians? Less said the better.

This Dasain, concerns about health and livelihoods have added to all the other burdens of society. The pandemic is spreading like wildfire ahead of the festival, and health experts warn that the upcoming Dasain-Tihar-Chhat season will be super-spreader events, since they involve family get-togethers and large gatherings.

Covid-19 is moving from India's cities to rural areas, Europe is bracing itself for a third wave, and the United States is suffering a sustained peak. Nepal was relatively unscathed for the first four months after the lockdown on 24 March. But Kathmandu squandered that lead,

lagged in testing, turned poorly managed quarantine centres into incubators for the virus, and failed to learn from Tarai cities.

Countries around the world that have witnessed the wildest spread are ones with poor leadership and governance. Politicians were either in denial, or dithered. They underestimated a virus that had figured out how to exploit the human need to mingle, travel, connect and to spread through asymptomatic carriers.

In Nepal, the government has now surrendered to the virus. It has left it up to citizens to take their own precautions, and the main priority of the state seems to be keep the economy sputtering along, so that there is tax revenue to pay for government expenses.

Even when their inner circle is infected, leaders have failed to

implement policies that would outwit SARS-CoV-2. Politics is business as usual in many countries, including Nepal. The pandemic has actually created a 'buffer' for the Oli administration, masking failures in performance and delivery that were evident even before Covid-19.

At a time when it should be taking emergency measures to defuse the Covid-19 explosion in Kathmandu Valley, the main order of business for the ruling Nepal Communist Party (NCP) is still the one-upmanship between factions led by Prime Minister K P Oli and his rival, co-chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

Even when senior advisers are down with the virus, and some ministers are hospitalised, they are still haggling over political appointees. On Wednesday, there were some cosmetic changes to fill vacant ministerial posts, including that of the finance minister.

Still, the health minister, under whose watch we have bungled and flip-flopped on

pandemic response, stays put. The Chair of the Covid-19 Crisis Management Committee is stripped of his defence minister portfolio, but is still calling the shots at the PMO, despite exposés of cronies involved in importing medical equipment and test kits.

All three new ministers inducted on Wednesday were Oli loyalists. In Karnali province, former UML members of the provincial assembly registered a vote of no confidence against the ex-Maoist chief minister.

The attempted 'coup' was foiled only after Dahal managed to get his ally Madhav Kumar Nepal to get his supporters to withdraw the vote.

These events clearly show that the fragile ceasefire between Oli and Dahal is not holding, and the NCP is behaving like it is still two parties.

The leadership duo is now going to be plotting seriously over the Dasain break to undermine each other. The pandemic be damned..

Kunda Dixit

**Running
to remain
in place**
EDITORIAL
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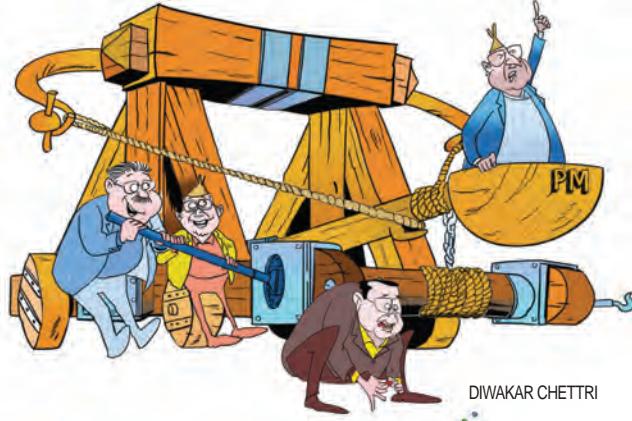
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GOING PLACES TOGETHER

PKD runs to remain in place

The vote of no-confidence this week by former UML leaders of the Nepal Communist Party (NCP) in Karnali Province against the ex-Maoist Chief Minister of their own party has exposed once more that the two sections of the ruling party never really united.

The distrust between the ex-Maoist and ex-UML members of the NCP has now trickled down from the power struggle at the centre to six of the seven provincial governments that the UML-Maoist alliance swept in the 2017 election.



The no-confidence motion fizzled out on Tuesday at the Karnali Province assembly in Surkhet after some former UML members loyal to Madhav Kumar Nepal sided with the ex-Maoists with Pushpa Kamal Dahal, Prime Minister's K P Oli's supporters were outnumbered.

Even though Oli and Dahal did patch up their differences last month, the saga of the epic struggle for supremacy within the party has dragged on with a deadlock in negotiations on a cabinet reshuffle.

Over the past two months, there has been a transformation in Kathmandu politics as Dahal's position has weakened significantly with second tier members breaking ranks.

This new dynamic has gone largely unremarked because of the tendency of commentators to be anti-incumbent. The Oli administration's frequent gaffes and governance failures, have provided ample ammunition for Dahal and his supporters. Still, despite concerns about his health and his political longevity, Oli has so far proved soothsayers wrong.

The NCP Secretariat meetings repeatedly demand that the Prime Minister and co-Chair give up one or both of his positions, and yet it just does not happen.

The reasons are twofold: Dahal does not have the numbers in the Central Committee, the official topline body of the party. The Secretariat sits above it as a body created by seniors to remain relevant. Secondly, it

was the wily Prime Minister's ability to go behind 'enemy lines' and talk to Dahal's own followers.

The more Dahal challenges Oli and fails in the effort, the weaker he becomes politically, and together with him his ally, the former UML Chair and former PM Madhav Kumar Nepal. The Dahal-Nepal duo has the numbers to wreck Oli's plans, which is how the attempted 'coup' in the Karnali assembly this week was foiled.

Dahal is a leader who has to run in order to remain in place, given that his party now functions without guiding principles, whereas other parties at least have ideological fig leaves. The Dahal-Oli duel at the top is costing the country dearly, diverting attention when all focus should be on the health and economic fallout of the worsening Covid-19 crisis.

Truth be told, the UML and Maoist parties united but there has never been a meeting of minds. The electoral alliance in 2017 propelled Oli to power, and gave Dahal a lifeline for a political career that was all set to sink.

What has changed in the last couple of months is that some senior Maoist leaders in the NCP have concluded that their individual medium- to long-term political future now can be guaranteed by the UML stream within the party rather than the Maoist stream led by Dahal.

Dahal's troubles create uncertainty about the future general convention of the NCP which is meant to cement the unification in word and deed. Given the ex-UML's nationwide base, Dahal may try to push back the convention so as not to face the day of reckoning.

For his part, Madhav Kumar Nepal has put all his eggs in Dahal's basket, while these key Maoist leaders were busy transferring their eggs out of it. Home Minister Ram Bahadur Thapa, Lekh Raj Bhatta, a Dahal loyalist, Top Bahadur Rayamajhi, Devendra Poudel, Janardan Sharma and others have abandoned Dahal.

As his grip on the reins begins to loosen, will Dahal mellow, or breathe fire through his pliant outlets on all matters from transitional justice to governance?

If he decides to go down fighting, Dahal might take his party and country down with him, and that will mean more years of political instability and socio-economic ruin to a country already ravaged by the pandemic. For his own sake, and for society at large, he should choose the softer route.

ONLINE PACKAGES



THE JIGSAW PUZZLE OF RESTORATION

The teachings of the Buddha are in a book written in gold and silver letters in the sacred texts of Pragya Paramita, housed in only four known places. In the latest episode of his Walkabout series, Anil Chitrakar delves deep into the meaning of the ancient scriptures. Videos only at Nepali Times YouTube Channel.



MELTING MOUNTAINS

The Tso Rolpa glacial lake has grown seven times in size since 1957, if it bursts it could affect up to 650,000 people downstream. But many locals in Dolakha think climate change is a hoax. Join Rastroraj Bhandari on a trip to the scenic, but dangerously full lake to see how precarious it is. Story: page 6-7.

HEALTH EMERGENCY

Not only health, government must also declare financial emergency since private sector are crippling with losses and unable to run their businesses ('Declare a health emergency', Shekhar Kharrel, #1031). Only government employees and the public sector are having good time, they can squeeze private sector dry to collect vat and taxes. They only shed crocodile tears.

Arniko Rajbhandary

Dasain is going to take the coronavirus to the smallest and most remote villages of Nepal as those infected in Kathmandu Valley return home to celebrate the festival. This is absolutely an avoidable tragedy.

Stephen T Eckerd

HUNTING IN NEPAL

This is a great photo story and it highlights the unfair contrast between foreign trophy hunters (legal) and indigenous hunters and inhabitants (illegal) ('Carrying on the hunting legacy in Nepal', Kishor Mahajan, #1031). The Dhorpatan Hunting Reserve is land which falls within the boundaries of their village municipalities, and to which they have, for centuries past, depended upon to supplement the increasingly meagre harvests from their fields. To put things in perspective, the average foreign hunter spends around \$30,000 for his hunting trip in Dhorpatan. Inhabitants who are banned from hunting live on less than \$120 per year. In other words, that \$30,000 would support one of them for 250 years!

Of course, there is a need to protect wild animal numbers and preserve bio-diversity versus human hunters. A compromise in game reserves in other parts of the world, allows indigenous people to hunt, providing they use traditional methods such as bow and arrows, or primitive guns. This could be a solution in Nepal.

Joy Stephens

ELEPHANTS

I, for one, would miss the magic of riding an elephant through the jungle ('The elephant dilemma', Lisa Choegyal, #1031). I think informed, humane use of elephants should continue. Are we going to condemn equestrians for riding horses?

Andrew Duncan

- No matter how you spin it, you are still promoting animal exploitation. The Enigma video hit the pop charts--but does nothing to promote the conservation of the animal or culture filmed. We are way past romanticising the era of Rudyard Kipling's Colonel Hathi of the Jungle Book.

Karuna Skariah

- Wonderful article and the enigma music clip is magic, thanks for sharing.

Jinta Gerhard Veit

BREAST CANCER MONTH

This October (Breast Cancer Awareness month) I am waiting to read an inspiring book from a survivor herself ('Moving forward to live pink', Sukechya Ghimire, #1031). We take our body system for granted while diseases could invade at anytime. Cancer Curry & Me can develop better understanding about breast cancer, get inspired from the author's transformation, and support breast cancer charity at the same time.

Srijana Acharya

Nepali Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Declare a health emergency

by Shekhar Kharrel

A feckless government and reckless citizens are dragging Nepal headlong into a deeper crisis. Author suggests declaring a health emergency to manage existing health infrastructure and personnel. Visit nepalitimes.com for continuous and exclusive Covid-19 coverage.

- Most reached and shared on Facebook
- Most commented

Govinda KC and the Right to Life

Editorial

Govinda KC's campaign is the best thing that could have happened under Nepal's new constitution. What could be more 'socialism oriented' than making health and medical support available to the people at large? KC ended his 19th hunger strike on the 28th day with an 8-point agreement. Follow us online for latest developments.

- Most popular on Twitter



Carrying on the hunting legacy in Nepal

by Kishor Mahajan

Hunting used to be a legitimate profession in rural Nepal until recently. Kishor Mahajan joins two from the last generation of professional hunters in western Nepal for this photo essay. Go online.

- Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
EDITORIAL: Govinda KC and the Right to Life
It is his breadth of experience and depth of commitment to #Nepal's under-served that drives his sacrifice. To read more:

Abhaya Subba @AbhayaSubba
#drgvindakc. One lone man's fight as we look on

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
In the minds of #Nepal's migrant workers
There is a #MentalHealth cost to the country's foreign remittance-dependent economy.
Read @upasanakhadka1's long report here:

Amod Pyakuryal @AmPyakuryal
Mental health is often swept under the rug, & plight of migrants seeking prosperity is even less understood.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Saving #Nepal's flyway for migrating cranes
On #WorldMigratoryBirdDay, let us pledge to protect the trans-Himalayan migratory route of Demoiselle Cranes so that they survive into the future, writes Rajendra N Suwal @RajuSuwal of @WWFNepal.

Night @Night04812666
How thrilling it should be! Demoiselle cranes soar up lifted by thermals as high as over 8,000 meters and fly across the Himalayan peaks to their destinations. I spotted flocks of migratory birds flying south in V formation today.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Hunting used to be a legitimate profession in rural Nepal until recently. There are still descendants of professional hunters, but they may be the last generation. Photo essay by Kishor Mahajan in Western Nepal @photocircle_np @nepalphotoproj @OsloMet

Amish Mulmi @amish973
One of the best photo essays I've seen in recent times.

Nepali Times @NepaliTimes
Moving forward to live pink
Cancer survivor @Sukechya recounts her struggle in a new book titled 'Cancer, Curry & Me'. The book is set to release in #BreastCancerAwarenessMonth. Read Ghimire's experience here:

Hima (@himabista) @himabista
I look forward reading this book @Sukechya "Cancer, Curry & Me" #BreastCancerAwarenessMonth

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

The #14 issue of Nepali Times 4-10 October 2000 shows how little things have changed in 20 years. An exclusive investigation on the Melchami project in that edition tried to get to the bottom of the delays in the scheme to bring water through a 26km tunnel from Langtang National park to Kathmandu, the capital is still waiting for the project to be finished.

Humla Rai reports on the political ramifications of Kathmandu's garbage mismanagement, particularly along the banks of the Bagmati, Teku and other areas. Another problem that has not been solved 2 decades later.

The paper also profiled Prem Suwal who was the youth leader and Mayor of Bhaktapur 20 years ago. The short story describes Suwal's modesty and his love for his city and passion to maintain Bhaktapur's rich culture and heritage. Suwal is now member of the Federal Parliament.

Excerpts from these three stories:



Trash is back: The dumping along the Bagmati was stopped after several aircraft suffered bird hits at the Kathmandu Airport recently, which many said could have resulted because the waste was attracting the birds.

"Studies have clearly established that using city waste as filling material for the Guheshwor-Gokarna road was totally safe and certainly the cause for the bird hazard at the airport," said Kul Prasad Marhatta, member-secretary of the Solid Waste Management National Council at the Local Development Ministry.

The government's search for a permanent dumping site began after the Gokarna landfill had run out of space. It has been considering four other potential sites since Ramkot, Syuchatar, Thankot, and Okharpauwa—and has even spent millions to build the necessary infrastructure.

Mayor Suwal: Mayor Prem Suwal of Bhaktapur isn't the kind of mayor that one would expect to meet in a city with a success story to relate. He doesn't go around in a fancy car, and he doesn't make reckless promises. Being down to earth is his style.

Running a city that is a living museum and heritage site is one thing, being successful at preserving the cultural traditions is quite another. Bhaktapur has been acclaimed for its conservation efforts.

"The hardest part was making people understand why we needed to preserve what is left, that it wasn't just my city or your city but our city. Once they understood this, everybody cooperated," explains Suwal.

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

Melchami on our minds: Kathmandu is running out of water, but this is due more to mismanagement and under-utilisation of existing supplies than a real shortage. Upgrading existing capacity and expanding antiquated water mains would be adequate for now. But at the rate Kathmandu is growing, the Valley will need extra water from outside. The Asian Development Bank is to give the final green light for the \$450 million project next month. But it will take at least six years for the first drop of water to reach Kathmandu.

With the population now nearing 1.5 million, the valley's only river has turned into a sewer. Water shortages have become a year-round phenomenon, not just something that happened in the dry season.



Publisher and Editor: Kunda Dixit

Digital Products Strategist: Sahina Shrestha, Associate Editor: Sonia Awale, Layout: Sanubabu Tamang

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editors@nepalitimes.com | www.nepalitimes.com | www.himalmedia.com

Tel: 01-5005601-08 Fax: +977-1-5005518



Srijana Acharya

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

WE WISH YOU A PROSPEROUS
VIJAYADASHAMI
AND A HAPPY
TIHAR,
FILLED WITH HAPPINESS,
PEACE AND PROSPERITY.



TURKISH AIRLINES

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 Choegyal

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 *hatasar*, 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 their very survival. Provoked



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

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. Naive 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 *hatasar*.

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



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.

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.



Nepal's data-centric future beyond Covid-19

Andy Chong was appointed CEO/MD of Ncell in November 2019 and has been with the Axiata Group since 2008. Chong is a cycling enthusiast and spends weekends exploring the terrain around the Valley and is interested in discovering challenging routes across Nepal. He spoke to *Nepali Times* this week about telecommunications during the Covid-19 crisis.

Nepali Times: Economic activity has come to a standstill globally, yet the telecommunication business appears to be least affected. Is this also the case in Nepal?

Andy Chong: It is true telecommunications businesses have been more resilient than many other industries which have been impaired by as much as 95%. For Ncell, while we are in a relatively better position compared to other big businesses, the telecoms are not spared. Telecommunication is a utility to a large extent, and during times like this, access to communications, content, services, entertainment almost uniquely channelled via data connectivity has been heightened.

In Nepal, telecommunications network utilisation has increased by more than 40%. However, the impact of increased use of services with people living at home and working from home has not translated to higher revenues.

Telecom companies were compelled to provide this essential service at subsidised rate to ensure our customers had connectivity during lockdowns. For example, we provided 120% bonus on top up, increased *saapati* amount, made balance transfer service available for free, provided 25% discount in data service, among others.

Has there been a slowdown in Ncell's growth in terms of customers as well as profit?

During the lockdown data traffic had jumped up by 40%, while overall income declined by 35%, and we believe the same was the case with other telcos. With easing of lockdown there is sign of some hope with business



recovering to 28% of pre-lockdown levels. Yet, this will take some time to reach to normalcy.

It is evident that consumer consumption behaviour has changed – we saw substantial shift from voice usage to data during the lockdown. As many as 1 million Ncell customers stopped using their services after lockdown which, we assume, is due to unemployment.

It will be a good outcome if all of us recover to within 90% of pre-covid levels before end 2021.

How do you see the future growth of the telecommunication sector in Nepal, and your own market share?

We will give priority to digitalisation of our key business areas as much as we can so when we get out of the pandemic, we are ahead of the curve and better able to serve our customers.

Our business strategy remains on track and investments as planned remain unchanged. We are going to be data oriented. Nepal is not

'digital' enough today – both from a supply and demand perspective. Had Nepal been up the curve in terms of its digital economy, the impact would have been lessened with easy access to services for customers.

Data is the future and there is significant opportunity for growth as Nepal embraces a digital future. Share of data in revenue of telecom companies have been increasing every year whilst voice remains relatively constant. We aspire to be a digital telco and strategy is data-centric, which for enterprises, we hope to be first choice of Nepali businesses to help them achieve their aspiration.

Limited competition has been cited as the reason for high cost for calls and data in Nepal. How do we compare with other countries in the region?

For making the data service cheaper and profitable, spectrum is needed to expand further to the rural areas. Data price had dropped significantly after the launch of 4G. Cost of the voice has already come down

and consumers are now concerned about data although they have alternatives – non-mobility data from their ISPs.

For example, in our Axiata operations in Cambodia can produce per GB data at a cost of 15-16 cents. But here in Ncell, due to the lack of sufficient spectrum, our per GB production cost approximately 70 cents. But for many of our data packs, our retail price per GB is well below 70 cents today. Therefore, to deliver lower price points to consumers, operators must be provided enough spectrum to lower its cost of production.

As the biggest foreign investor in Nepal today what needs to be done to attract more foreign investment into the country?

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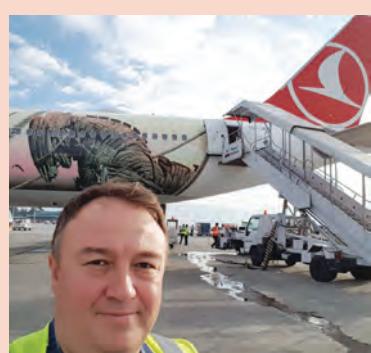
Turkish 3 flights/week

Turkish Airlines, the only European airline serving Kathmandu has increased its Istanbul flight frequency to three a week to mark its seventh anniversary of connecting Nepal to the world.

"We are increasing our flight frequency to three weekly, and bookings are slowly picking up," says Turkish Airlines manager for Nepal Abdullah Tuncer Kececi. "With protocols for tourist arrival and health safety, we think Nepal's nature and adventure will be one of the first choices of international passengers."

Turkish Airline says it ensures thorough disinfection of aircraft cabin after every flight, there are HEPA filters on board that can remove 99.97% of all particles with diameters up to 0.3 microns. With a 7 hour flight time, the Istanbul connection is the longest distance direct flight from Kathmandu at present.

"Hygiene expert cabin crews are appointed on our flights, and they are



in charge of lavatory disinfection and enforcement of all on-board safety and social distancing measures," Kececi told *Nepali Times*. "As the airline flying to the most destinations in the world, Turkish Airline's vision from day one has been to connect Nepal to the world. Nepal is a tourism destination for us, and we hope that as things get back to normal we will continue to be a partner for Nepal's tourism and aviation industry into the future."

City Express & Al Fardan

City Express Money Transfer and Al Fardan Exchange, Dubai have launched a 'Dasain Tihar Bumper Dhamaka' lucky draw campaign. Customers can win home appliances every week as well as cash prizes of up to Rs600,000. All customers sending money from Al Fardan Exchange in Dubai to Nepal via City Express are eligible for the scheme, which will last till 14 November.

Sanima and Sasto Deal

Sanima Bank has unveiled a 'Big Deal at Sasto Deal' festival scheme, which offers Sanima Sajilo e-banking users paying via QR code a 25% discount or up to Rs2,500 cash-back while shopping at Sasto Deal. Customers will receive discounts on a first come first serve basis during this offer, which will last until 17 October.



TATA Dasain

Sipradi Trading has launched its Dasain scheme "यो दसाई किन मान्ने बोर, टाटा मोटर्सले दिन्दूलपार मार" that offers customers various electronic appliances as gifts on the purchase and booking of each of TATA's commercial vehicles. Customers will also receive a coupon of one year worth of free service. Sipradi has also added a workshop in Junge Khola of Dhading district for service and maintenance.

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The human face of a Himalayan climate crisis

Fatalism and denial among mountain communities living downstream from a dangerous glacial lake

Rastraraj Bhandari
in Dolakha

In a small riverbank community of Donggang below Mt Gauri Shankar, Janmu Sherpa runs a small teahouse. The settlement has two families who are still rebuilding their homes after the earthquake five years ago.

Janmu has a dozen goats, her primary companions in this wilderness near the Chinese border. The tea house is a rest stop for trekkers headed up to Tso Rolpa glacial lake, or onwards to Tashi Laptse Pass to Khumbu.

With the Himalaya warming between 0.3-0.7°C faster than the global average, these mountains will lose at least one-third of their ice by the end of the century. And that is the best-case scenario, according to the *Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment: Climate Change, Sustainability and People* put together last year by Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD).

The increased melting means melt water is accumulating in glacial lakes that absorb and transmit thermal energy to the glacier face, causing a positive-feedback loop and accelerating the thaw. The lakes are growing in size, and are at risk of bursting to flood downstream valleys. Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF) can be caused by avalanches falling into the lakes, or by earthquakes.

In the late 1990s, the risk of a GLOF event from Tso Rolpa led to panic among people living in the Tama Kosi Valley below. Scientists had been monitoring the lake which had grown seven times in size since 1957.

Twenty years ago, the Nepal government with international partners constructed a 70m canal that lowered the water level of the lake by 3m. Scientists believed the water level needed to be lowered by 20m to mitigate the risk of a GLOF, but this was better than nothing.

The resulting decrease in pressure on the terminal moraine is probably why Tso Rolpa did not burst during the 12 May 2015 aftershock which was epicentred just 10km away. Nonetheless, the risk still exists as scientists reassess the state and vulnerability of the lake.

Out of the 1,466 glacial lakes in Nepal, 21 pose potential risks and six are considered to be at a high risk of an outburst. There have been at least 14 glacial lake flooding events recorded in the last decade in the region.

A future Tso Rolpa GLOF would cost lives, property, infrastructure development projects including hydropower plants, livelihood, tourism and trade, forest, pastures and fisheries. ICIMOD estimates the tangible damage of a lake burst would range from \$2-9 million depending on the duration, velocity and flooding level with almost 650,000 people up to 100km downstream affected.



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

ALL PHOTOS: RASTRARAJ BHANDARI

However, people living along the Tama Kosi appear to be either oblivious or skeptical of the danger. Many think it is a hoax spread by the international community to mine precious stones. A hut next to the lake has a Maoist slogan that reads 'End American Imperialism, Long Live the Nepal Maoist Party'.

"Ordinary citizens cannot understand why else the government and foreigners would spend almost \$3 million dollars on future climate change when many villages in the region urgently need proper schools, health-post and roads," explains Charikot resident Akal Man Maharjan.

Out of the 407 young undergraduate students from Dolakha and Kathmandu interviewed recently, more than one-third believed glacial flooding to be a hoax.

Janmu Sherpa is different. Despite having no formal education, her knowledge of global warming stems from her closeness to nature of which she considers herself to be a part. She has noticed erratic weather with an increased frequency of flash floods and landslides.

Tso Rolpa is directly upstream from Donggang, but the lack of alternatives and fatalism has helped her put climate change at the back of her mind and carry on with her daily life.

"No one knows when the lake will burst, so we cannot stop our daily chores. Let fate decide," Janmu Sherpa tells us.

This diverse narrative among Nepalis means that the government faces the complexity of turning public awareness into climate action while trying to reduce poverty, marginalisation of women, state neglect of indigenous communities, racial discrimination and out-migration.

These socio-economic issues overlap, and policymakers are faced with the difficult task of identifying and implementing policy that prioritise climate adaptation alongside raising the livelihoods of mountain communities.

Up here in the Rolwaling, one thing is clear: the focus of research must shift to human-



Janmu Sherpa who operates a small tea house in the village of Donggang climate change has experienced first hand, but says, "Let fate decide."



Akal Man Maharjan operates the Bajaj dealership in Charikot, and says most people think climate change is a conspiracy.

centric solutions, one that brings scientists, mountain communities, transient visitors, the government and activists together. Indigenous mountain communities are well placed to observe changes and flood events, but they are often unaware of the predicted consequences.

Subsistence living, the inability to comprehend complex scientific studies, weak government institutions rampant with corruption, and traditional beliefs make matters worse. Hence the hoax theory.

Engaging local residents as citizen scientists who can contribute to data collection and documentation would be a step. Micro-insurance schemes are a great tool in protecting low-income communities against risks of climate change in exchange for a regular payment of premiums proportion to the likelihood and cost of the relevant risk.

The mountains are melting before our eyes. People living here are unable to stop it, they can only adapt to the changes. Some do it by putting it out of their minds and plodding along in forced denial. Others think the climate crisis is a conspiracy.

While the long-term impacts of climate change are widely understood among many residents of Nepal, it means very little to people who struggle to live in this harsh environment.

Rastraraj Bhandari is pursuing a Masters in Economics and China Studies at the Yenching Academy of Peking University in Beijing.



Tso Rolpa glacial lake has grown seven times in size since 1957; if it bursts it could affect up to 650,000 people downstream. But many locals think climate change is a hoax. Join us on a trip to the scenic, but dangerously full lake to see how precarious it is.

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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



injured family members to hospital where her father and mother had to spend three weeks. Police in Maharaiganj 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."

BB 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

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 Kapilavastu.



"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 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 They 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.

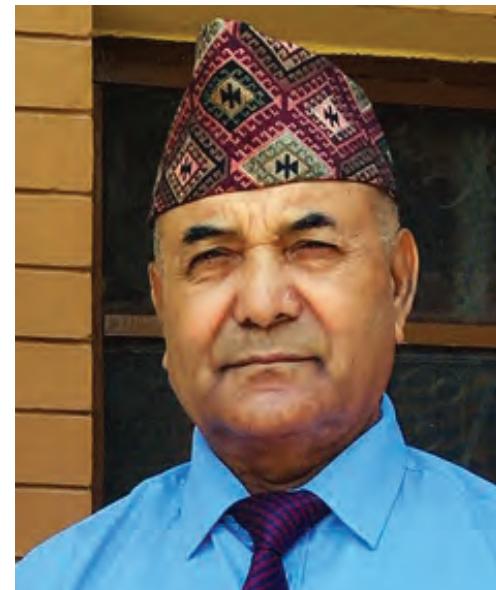
In 2012, when she wanted to stand for election to a school management committee she was forced to step down because of her caste. Her rivals thought she might win, so they threatened and intimidated her. "After it got nasty, I thought it was just not worth it," she says.

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

En 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 Kapilavastu 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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Nepal, China re-measure height of Mt Everest

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

Sonia Awale

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Indeed, Survey Department

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The ground penetrating radar that the Survey Department team left on the summit of Mt Everest last May measures the ice cap at the summit and monitors its thickness. This can be used to calculate the rock height of the summit.

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

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

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



KARMA TENZING



Everest measurement timeline

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

Gravity Survey and trigonometry map of the Everest region (below).



How high is high?

The modern history of Mt Everest is replete with debate about its true height. The Great Trigonometric Survey (GTS) of India in 1856 declared the mountain the highest in the world at 8,840m – and named the peak after Sir George Everest, its chief in 1865.

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

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

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



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Conditions Apply

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.

Kite fight over Kathmandu



MONIKA DEUPALA

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

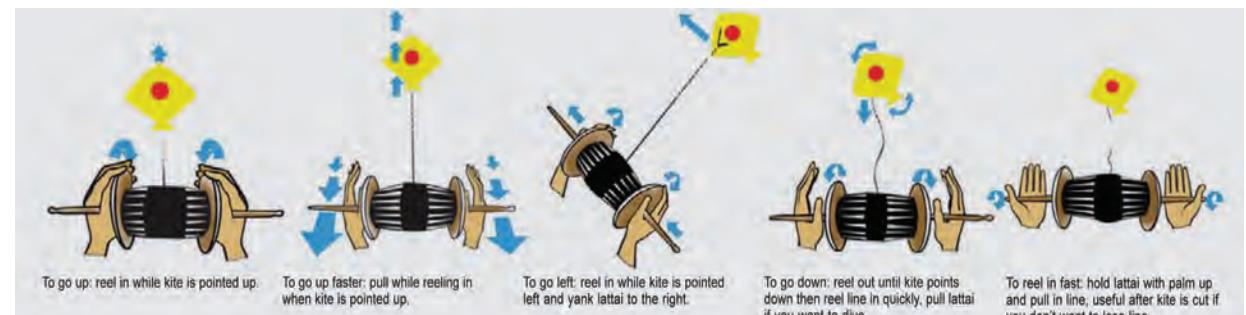
Traditionally, Nepali kites were made of hand-made lokta paper. They were heavy and took a stiff breeze to get air borne, and are rare now. But once up, they behaved like lumbering bombers – unlike latter day 'Lucknow' kites which were made of lighter paper and are more maneuverable. Although they do 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 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 *tikta* 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



KITE GLOSSARY

- Majha:** line armour
- Mandali:** stone on string used to prey on low-fliers
- Kaka:** string at point where it is tied to kite
- Phuun:** show-off kite aerobatics
- Tthini:** launching kite by co-pilot
- Lappa:** stall
- Hi-chair:** cut kite
- Gwankh:** paperweight to give kite lateral balance
- Ghumaure:** kite that tumbles when reeled out
- Tikta:** 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
- Dharke:** kite with stripes
- Puchhare:** kite with tail
- Lattai:** thread reel

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.

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.

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EVENTS

**Fulpati**

The seventh day of Dasain is dedicated to Kalratri, the seventh form of Goddess Durga. A holy water vessel, banana stalks, *jamara*, and sugar cane are brought to Hanuman Dhoka from Gorkha after which there is a military parade.

23 October, Tundikhel

**Maha Ashtami**

On the eighth day, animals like buffaloes, goats, roosters, and ducks are sacrificed to appease, Kali — the fiercest manifestation of Goddess Durga. Newa communities also celebrate 'Khadga Puja' on this day.

24 October, Basantapur Darbar Square

Maha Nawami

On the ninth day, official military ritual sacrifices take place under gunfire salutes at the Kot courtyard. The God of creation, Vishwakarma is worshipped, which includes blood sacrifices to vehicles, tools, even aircraft for safety and well-being.

25 October, Taleju Mandir, Hanuman Dhoka

Bijaya Dashami

The main event of Dasain is a celebration of Goddess Durga's victory over the Demon Mahisur, and Lord Ram's victory over the Demon Ravan. Hence, from the tenth day until the *purnima*, families receive *tika*, *jamara* and blessings from elders.

26 October

**Sunday Sessions**

On the final episode of season 1, writer and social justice activist Sarita Pariyar will join journalist Prateebha Tuladhar to talk about her work in caste questions, Dalit rights and equity in Nepal. Tune in to the livestream on Facebook.

18 October, 5pm

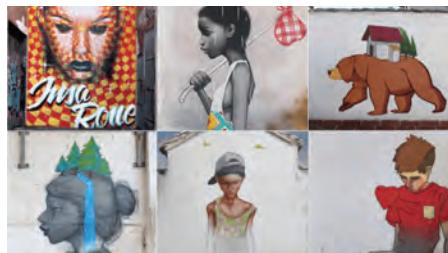
**Changa Chait**

Start this Dasain off by taking part in a Kite flying contest at Bhoye Chhen Restaurant. Eat, drink and enjoy some good music during the Changa Chait contest.

17 October, 11am, Bhoye Chhen Restaurant, Basantapur, Rs1000, 9851220397

Virtual street art

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

**VICE**

Watch documentaries about anything and everything from all over the world on the VICE YouTube channel. Start from documentaries about Nepal's honey harvesters, *The Nepalese Honey That Makes People Hallucinate*, as well as the most recent documentary on human trafficking in Nepal.

**Children's Digital Library**

Looking for ways to keep children occupied? The International Children's Digital Library has children's books from all over the world, including *Adventures of a Nepali Frog* by Kanak Mani Dixit from Nepal.

Divya

Celebrate Nepali art and artists. Check out the work of 17 traditional artists online through Tulikaa Kala's website, <https://tulikaa.com>. The artwork is also available to purchase.

ONLINE ARCHIVES

**MoNA exhibitions**

Go to the Museum of Nepali Art website to watch two 360° virtual art exhibitions: *Tangential stress 2020*, a contemporary exhibition featuring 19 prominent artists and their work under lockdown and *Inception*, a collection of Nepali artistic masterpieces by some of Nepal's best traditional artists.

DINING

**Detox Cafe**

If kickstarting that health-regime sounds appealing, order Detox Cafe's Glazed chicken salad, Buckwheat brownies and banana bread. What's more, there is a special bakery sale going on. Check out the cafe's menu on Foodmandu and buy some yummy and healthy cookies.

9849371072

Friday night BBQ

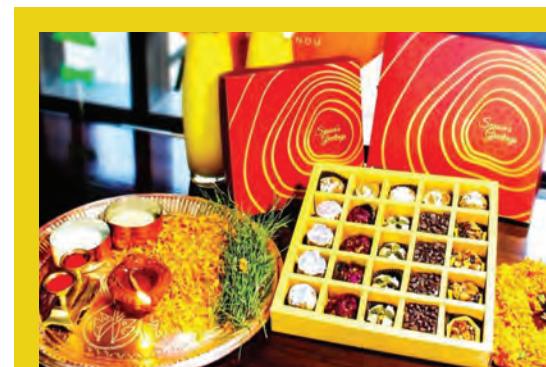
Unwind on Friday fall evenings with a buffet of delicious barbecue and dinner with music, beer and more at Park Village Resort. An overnight package is also available.

Fridays, 6pm, Park Village Resort, Budhanilkantha, Rs2,020/person (01) 4375280

**Lhakpa's Chulo**

From Nepali dal bhat, Newa khaja, Swiss Rosti, Italian Risotto and Thai green curry, Lhakpa's Chulo has a variety of cuisines to offer. The garlic chilli prawn at this cosy restaurant is to die for.

Jhamsikhel (01) 5542986

**Mithai by Marriott**

Send gifts to family this Dasain with delectable *mithai* from handcrafted hampers extensively curated by Sanjeev Ranjan of Kathmandu Marriott Hotel. Call for details.

Kathmandu Marriott Hotel, 9801971643

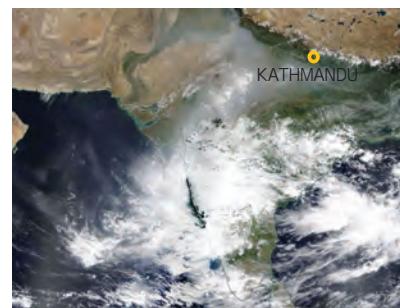
**Embassy Restaurant**

Enjoy a hearty meal in this centrally located restaurant known for its lively ambience and assorted menu. Try the Duck Breast, served on a bed of mashed potatoes and roasted vegetables in a rich peppery steak sauce.

Lazimpat, 9802024040



Going places together - qatarairways.com

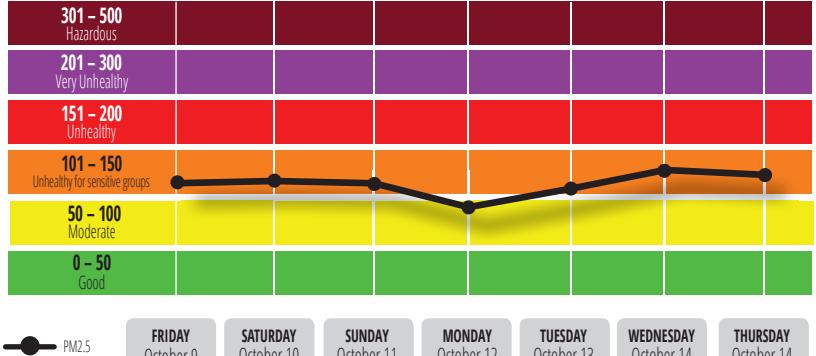


As can be seen in this satellite image of the Subcontinent on Thursday morning (left) a depression that started in the Bay of Bengal has moved right across Central India. This will bring some moisture our way, but not much. We can also see the blue haze from crop residue fires in northern India being pushed in our direction by prevailing westerlies. Expect hazy skies, and some afternoon cloud buildup over the Nepal mountains in the weekend.

FRIDAY 28° 14° SATURDAY 28° 13° SUNDAY 28° 13°

AIR QUALITY INDEX

KATHMANDU, 9 - 15 October



As night temperature falls to 15 degrees in Kathmandu Valley, the inversion layer has started trapping urban pollutants. That is why the Air Quality Index was in the orange zone most days this week, meaning it was 'Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups'. But that is just the daily average, at peak rush hour, AQI was even higher. For live AQI go to www.nepaltimes.com The concentration of pollutants including particulate matter smaller than 2.5 microns will continue to rise as winter approaches and traffic picks up. Ambient air also poses additional risk to the SARS-CoV-2 virus this year. Mask up, and stay safe.

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

ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI

KRIPA JOSHI

**PROTECT OUR GLACIERS**

Glaciers are massive blocks of moving ice that are created, over millennia, as accumulated snow compacts and recrystallises. But global warming is causing them to retreat across the planet at an alarming rate. Ice that took centuries to develop vanish in just a few years. Melting glaciers lead to rising sea levels, altered climate patterns and the slowing of oceanic currents which increases extreme weather events around the world. It also means less fresh water for drinking, a lower hydroelectric generation capacity and less water for irrigation. The white surfaces of glaciers also reflect the sun's rays and helps to cool the planet. In the Himalaya, glaciers are melting and creating huge lakes. A glacier lake outburst would cause massive damage to life and property downstream. Glaciers are early indicators of climate change and we need to reduce global CO2 emissions in order to curtail global warming and save the glaciers. #FridaysForFuture

**OUR PICK**

In October 2019, Amazon released a web series titled *Modern Love* based on *New York Times* weekly column of the same name. The eight-hour-long series explores various love stories from New York City and different facets of love: romantic, platonic and self. *Modern Love* has been renewed for the second season and has an ensemble cast of Anne Hathaway, Tina Fey, Dev Patel, Andy Garcia and Ed Sheeran to name a few.

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Nepal's women envoys make a mark

In Oman, Spain, Israel, Japan, Nepal's female ambassadors are proudly flying the flag

Pratistha Rijal

NePAL has a female president and a Constitution that reserves positions in government and legislatures to women, and in the foreign service women diplomats make up more than half the ranking staff. Five of Nepal's 25 currently serving ambassadors are women.

During the Covid-19 crisis, Nepal's women ambassadors have shown that they are as good as, if not better than, their male colleagues in ensuring the welfare of Nepalis abroad as well as projecting the country's international image.

"Society must stop judging women simply for their gender. We are not men, and we shouldn't be compared to them. Our inherent femininity, sensitivity, nurturance, emotional temperament, are our best qualities," says Nepal's ambassador to Oman Sarmila Parajuli Dhakal, who has been praised for ensuring the repatriation of stranded Nepali workers, and bargaining with airlines to get them cheaper air fares than those negotiated by the government in Kathmandu.

In June, Dhakal personally went to Muscat airport to see off the first batch of returning workers. As of this week, the embassy had arranged seven rescue flights, repatriating 1,178 stranded workers. Between 10% to 30% of migrant workers in various Gulf states have lost their jobs, and Nepal's embassies in other Gulf countries are struggling with the sheer numbers who want to return.

Last month, Ambassador Dhakal and the Oman Ministry of Foreign Affairs signed an agreement to lease land for construction of a permanent Nepal Embassy in Muscat, a diplomatic milestone for a Gulf monarchy that is emerging as a major destination for Nepali workers, as well as source of tourism and investment.

Anjan Shakya, Nepal's ambassador to Israel, has also been making inroads into ensuring well-paying jobs for Nepalis, and has just negotiated an agreement with Israel to provide openings for 500 more Nepali caregivers.

"It takes a woman to understand better the problems of women. They must be brought into politics, and in policy and decision-making positions," Shakya says. "Female political participation is crucial in addressing gender issues and bringing about gender equality. Our 2015 constitution has ensured gender balance in politics. We must abide by it."

Ambassador Shakya is also pushing an agreement with Israel to set up Centres for Excellence in Agriculture in each of Nepal's seven provinces as part of Nepal's goal of food self-sufficiency. Recently, Shakya was the first Asian envoy to be named 'Ambassador of the Year' by the Ambassadors' Club of Israel.

She says: "Just like a chariot needs two wheels to move, Nepal cannot move ahead if half of our population is left behind. So we have to engage and involve women."

Even though five of Nepal's ambassadors abroad are women, only one of them, Sewa Lamsal the out-going ambassador in Pakistan, is a career diplomat. Prativa Rana, Nepal's long-serving ambassador to Japan, is from the RPP party and mother of Arzu Deuba, wife of NC leader Sher Bahadur Deuba. Anjana Shakya and Dawa Futi Sherpa are



Sarmila Parajuli Dhakal, Ambassador to Oman



Dawa Phuti Sherpa, Ambassador to Spain



Anjan Shakya, Ambassador to Israel



Prativa Rana, Ambassador to Japan

said to be close to Prime Minister KP Oli. And as with foreign services of other countries, there is some tension between careerists and those named ambassadors by political parties.

But political appointees do have their advantages. Ambassador Dhakal, for instance, has been able to use her connections in the labour recruitment sector to focus on migrant issues. And Ambassador Sherpa, who grew up surrounded by mountaineers and tourism entrepreneurs, has used her background to organise promotional events and hopes to further strengthen cooperation between the Madrid-based World Tourism Organisation and Nepal Tourism Board.

"Nepali women have fewer economic assets, less access to finance, higher rates of illiteracy, and little knowledge of their legal rights," says Ambassador Sherpa. "We are generally bound to responsibilities at home and have fewer opportunities than men for earning income and participating in decision making and governance."

She adds: "To attract and include more women in politics, we need to start at the very beginning: more opportunities and access to education, information, empowerment and mentorship. And while promoting gender equality in politics, we also must be aware of ethnic diversity and representation at the table."

Nepal's constitution does guarantee female representation and reservation for disadvantaged castes and ethnicities. Political parties are required to have women in one-third of positions in federal and provincial assemblies, and half the proportional representation seats are reserved for women. If a mayor or municipality chair is a man, the deputy has to be a woman.

In 2019, all four of the national political parties Nepal Communist Party (NCP), Nepali Congress (NC), Federal Socialist Forum Nepal (FSFN), and Rastriya Janata Party (RJP) failed to meet the criteria that one third of their members be female.

In line with the constitutional requirement that the president and vice-president must be of different gender or ethnicity, President Bidya Devi Bhandari made history in 2015 as Nepal's first female head of state. She is currently one of the only 22 female heads of state worldwide.

However, the constitution has not been able to make Nepal's political sphere completely inclusive. Traditional patriarchal values persist in Nepal, most glaringly in its citizenship laws, and senior politicians and legislators often make misogynist remarks in public.

Currently, only three out of 17 ministers in the cabinet are female. A recent report shows that across Nepal, most-primary leadership positions in local governments are

held by men, while most secondary leadership positions are held by women.

Indeed, as per a 2020 World Bank report on economic empowerment of women, Nepal scored merely 73.8 points out of 100-lagging behind the global average of 75.2 points. The report examines factors such as legal rights, equality of pay, access to assets pension, etc. The 2020 Global Gender Index ranks Nepal 133rd in terms of educational attainment-only 59.7% Nepali women are literate, in stark comparison to 78.6% Nepali men.

Patriarchal norms manifest themselves in all spheres of life in Nepal: femicide, child marriage, online harassment, period stigma, high maternal mortality rates, illiteracy, and trafficking. Some of these problems have become more

serious with the Covid-19 restrictions.

The persistent gender gap in Nepal has been hard to eradicate despite laws and quotas. Studies and public opinion polls show that women in politics encounter more barriers, are subjected to more stereotyping and objectification, and are held up to greater scrutiny than men who are in similar positions of power.

One example of this was Lucky Sherpa, who was named Nepal's ambassador to Australia in 2017, but resigned on moral grounds after her own Nepali driver, whom she had fired, accused her of human trafficking. The former member of the Constituent Assembly was appointed by the then Maoist party, and her supporters said she had been framed. Sherpa herself has said she was the target of a witch hunt.

Despite quotas, therefore, 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. Many resign, either because of mistreatment, out of frustration at being passed over for promotion, or for family reasons.

Ram Krishna Tiwari, head of the Political Science Department at Tribhuvan University, says that even among Nepali women, some are more disadvantaged than others because there are also overlapping class, caste and ethnic hierarchies.

"In the high mountains and the Tarai livelihood is more difficult, so women are more focused on putting food on the table, and surviving from day to day, than participating in politics," he explains. "Women in the mid-mountains have a greater reach in politics, so they are more active."

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सिटी एक्सप्रेस मनि ट्रान्सफर नार्फत
नेपालमा पैसा पठाउने व्यक्ति स्वतः यो योजनामा सहभागी हुनेछन् ।

Nepal's acid attack survivors find a saviour

Activist Ujjwal Bikram Thapa says he will not rest until this crime is eradicated

Sabina Devkota

For those who are convinced that Nepal is a hopeless cause, and nothing can be achieved, Ujjwal Bikram Thapa is a shining example of activism with impact.

The day 28 September will forever be etched in this activist's memory. After years of lobbying to stop acid attacks that continue to disfigure mostly young women, Nepal's President Bidya Devi Bhandari finally signed into law two ordinances regulating acid sales and criminalising perpetrators of acid attacks.

"It was a victory for all the survivors of acid attacks, a recognition of their suffering and sacrifice," says Thapa, who has been working relentlessly for the last six years helping many of them with medical treatment and rehabilitation. "They are the heroes. I am simply a medium for change."

Ujjwal Bikram Thapa, 52, says his main inspiration for social service is his father Mohan Bikram, Nepal's first forest conservation officer. After the 2015 earthquake, he helped construct 1,000 shelters for families, and has also helped 400 victims of burn related violence, many of them young women punished by in-laws for inadequate dowry.

Thapa has devoted his life to social service, and started out helping his father to take care of patients from the family's ancestral district of Sindhuli to get medical treatment in Kathmandu. After his father died nine years ago, Thapa carried on the work, financing it with earnings from his wife and other investments.

Thapa has been encouraged by another famous alumni of Sherwood College in Nainital, Amitabh Bachchan, who has helped publicise his work with acid victims in Nepal and India.

Indian acid attack activist Laxmi Agrawal also called Thapa last month to appreciate his work to have acid attacks criminalised by law in Nepal – a legislation that has been stuck in India itself. Agrawal's ordeal became the theme of the Bollywood film *Chappak*, with Deepika Padukone playing her part.

Thapa's work has not just been to offer immediate assistance for emergency treatment of acid attack victims and to give them a new lease of life, but also to work as a one-man pressure group to bring the new ordinance in force.

Among those who have benefited from his assistance are acid attack survivors Sangita Magar, Jenny Khadka, Bindabasini Kansakar and many others, whom he has arranged jobs at Kumari Bank. Another victim, Ramraja Thapa, recently found work in the Attorney General's office.

Thapa's counselling and comfort emboldens victims to move on from their experiences. He says: "I would rather let them cry for three hours than give them false hope and pretences. Often, I would be the only person telling them that they will probably never look the same."

Instead of pitying survivors, Thapa's approach has been to restore their confidence and self-esteem. He encouraged 14-year-



Pabitra Karki and Jenny Khadka



"Ujjwal Sir, this is for Jenny's treatment."

Before he could ask her anything more, she disappeared. He opened the envelope to find Rs21. Thapa is emotional relating this incident.

Thapa was awarded Nepal's Social Service Medal on Constitution Day last month, but he says the real prize will be won by Nepalis the day the legislation comes into full effect.

While coverage of acid attacks are mostly sensational stories of rejected proposals and revenge on women, there is a broader criminal intent. Four male victims of such attacks have been reported, not one of whom has received any state assistance. With new legislation in place, they are hopeful to also be recognised.

"Gender will no more be an issue in the delivery of justice," says Rajaram Thapa, whose wife threw acid on him.

The new laws introduce tougher punishment for perpetrators.

Murder by acid attack carries a life sentence, while damage to vital organs such as eyes, ears, mouth and chest now carries a 20-year prison term. Damage to limbs and peripheral organs carries a 15-year term, while even the intent to attack carries at least a 10-year sentence.

The government has also waived treatment costs for victims, taking responsibility for their preliminary and long-term treatment.

The new laws are expected to reduce acid attacks by tightening acid sales and reducing access to them.

old Muskan Khatun to write to Prime Minister KP Oli, facilitating the high-profile parliamentary hearing, and a meeting last month at Baluwatar between Oli and acid attack survivors that led to the Cabinet decision on the ordinance.

Thapa has also built a solidarity group of acid attack survivors who help each other, visiting the latest victim in hospital to provide moral and material support. Many call Thapa "father", "uncle" or sometimes even "grandfather", and speak of him with great fondness.

The first person at Rajaram Thapa's side at Teaching Hospital recently, for instance, was 16-year-old Muskan Khatun, who herself was splashed with acid last year in Birganj by a rejected suitor.

"Ties of acid run thicker than blood," explains Thapa, who traces the beginning of his work with acid attack victims to an incident at Bir Hospital in 2015. He was attending to an ailing relative, when there was a loud commotion at the emergency.

Sangita Magar had just been brought in, her head disfigured and crying in pain. She was 16 when a young man threw acid at her during an SLC tuition class in Kathmandu.

Thapa's world shook as he pictured his three daughters in Sangita's place. "I could not bear looking at her. I could only see my daughters in her place," he recalls. "This was the first time in my life I felt so helpless."

Thapa decided to turn his outrage into action, and his appeals to then Prime Minister Lokendra Chand and Home Minister Bamdev Gautam secured free treatment for Sangita, who went on to finish her SLC exam and get free college education at Nobel Academy.

The new legislation will now allow survivors like Sangita to have the government cover lifetime treatment costs, and her nasal reconstruction surgery that will cost Rs1.8 million will also be possible. Her nose was so badly burnt by the acid that surgeons grafted tissue from her thigh to allow her to breathe through her left ear.

"After seven years, Sangita will not have to breathe through her ear again, she can breathe through her nose," Thapa says.

Bindabasini Kansakar had Rs70 worth of acid thrown at her, but her medical treatment so far has cost Rs20 million. Says Thapa: "The shopkeeper who sold the acid must have made just Rs20 profit on that bottle. With the new law, he will not be able to sell acid so easily."

In September 2018, Samjhana and Sushmita Das had acid splashed on them by a neighbour in Rautahat district. Samjhana had nearly 50% burns and her skin had melted



Ujjwal Bikram Thapa

away. Sushmita's injuries were less serious.

Samjhana fought for life, but died 12 days later, the hospital would not let her family take her body until they paid the bills. "I made a promise to Samjhana's soul that day I would not rest until these crimes are stopped," Thapa says.

Jenny Khadka was attacked with acid by husband Bishnu Bhujel in May 2019 after a quarrel. She was taken to the burns hospital in Kirtipur. The crime on Khadka had been in the media headlines, and Thapa remembers a 12-year-old girl greeting him at the hospital entrance giving him an envelope and saying:

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Take to pottery during the pandemic

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

Monika Deupala



MONIKA DEUPALA

Amidst Covid-19 surge in Kathmandu Valley, 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 there are no travel restrictions.

"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 with the lockdown fully lifted.

Subekhya 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 lifting of the lockdown. They see it as their responsibility to society to keep their family heritage alive, while giving people a chance to de-stress during the Covid-19 crisis.

DYNAMIC CERAMIC



At Cera Nepal in Bhaktapur, new mothers and youth seeking recreational activities during the Covid-19 crisis are taking pottery classes to de-stress while learning a new skill. Take a look.

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Covid-19 changes students' career paths

As they struggle with disrupted classes, enterprising students are using the lockdown to turn hobbies into business ventures

- **Sampurna Basnet** and **Dibya Shrestha**, students at the Kathmandu School of Law, have their final year exams pushed back indefinitely due to Covid-19. They have used this time to work on Mero Wokil, a new online legal news portal.
- A student group has set up **COPE Nepal**, a voluntary initiative to collect, present and disseminate Covid-19 data visualisation.
- **Harshitaa Agrawal**, whose graduate studies were put on hold, co-founded a spatial design firm, Studio Rever, with a friend in Mumbai.
- **Rincheen Phinsto Sherpa** started Bumble Beads, a bracelet venture, and cannot keep up with demand.
- **Medha Malla**, a recent high-school graduate, and **Supriya KC**, first year BBA student at Pokhara College of Management, have opened Chevron.np, a tie-dye shirt business.
- **Tashi Cheozum Lama** (stage name TASHIII), an undergraduate student, has internationally debuted her first single 'New York City Lights'.

Half a year since Nepal began sporadically imposing lockdowns to contain Covid-19, schools and colleges have had to turn to remote learning. But



GOOD IDEAS: Supriya KC and Medha Malla wearing tie-dye tops made by Chevron.np, a company they started during the pandemic.

the lack of trained teachers, the digital divide, constant government flipflopping, and immigration uncertainties have meant that most student are looking for other avenues.

For some, this has been an opportunity to change their career paths, turn hobbies into business ventures, while others have hit upon startup ideas to augment family income.

Says Sampurna Basnet at Mero Wokil: "This lockdown has given us the time and freedom to work on making information and news about the legal sector available to a large public. We have been able to spread legal awareness, as well as explore the nexus between law and technology."

Supriya KC and Medha Malla noticed the popularity of tie-dye attire on TikTok, and with business management classes in college being

erratic, they decided to see if their venture Chevron.np could function from home. KC handles accounts while Malla is responsible for dyeing and deliveries.

"It has been therapeutic for us, helping us deal with the pressures and uncertainties of the lockdown, while putting into practice what we have learnt in our books about the intricacies of running a business," Malla says.

Over at COPE Nepal, co-founder Anup Satyal says the lockdown has opened up a whole lot of opportunities in Nepal for him and his colleagues.

"People of my generation tend to prefer to go abroad, but the pandemic has shown that in fact we can stay in Nepal and do something that has meaningful impact," Satyal says.

With a workforce made up of specialists on data analytics,

branding, and communications, COPE Nepal uses advanced data science techniques to create reports on the pandemic. These reports have been picked up by various media, including the humanitarian information portal ReliefWeb.

Visualising data, and making it easily understandable to policy-makers and the public enables greater understanding of trends of the pandemic, its demographic breakdown, and allows proper plans to be in place to deal with the health and economic impact of the pandemic.

For instance, COPE's gender and age breakdown of Nepal's Covid-19 caseload illustrates with very simple graphics which segment of the population is most impacted – in Nepal the positive cases are mostly among younger people, but fatalities are in an older cohort.

After Harshitaa Agrawal's plans to attend graduate school were compromised by the pandemic, she co-founded Studio Rever which specialises in art installations, interior design, set designs, and product styling. Agrawal and co-founder Ankita Saigal, based in Mumbai, met while pursuing their undergraduate degrees in the US.

Their plan to open Studio Rever, which had been in the cookbooks for a while, seemed too far-fetched till Covid-19 created a world where they could work together despite being located in different countries. Now, their firm is fully operational and has hired a marketing intern.

Says Agrawal: "Of course, things have been slow because of Covid. But on the upside, it has given us extra time to research and

figure out backend logistics, without which our launch wouldn't have been possible."

Rincheen Phinsto Sherpa always loved wearing and making bracelets, but she never imagined she could make a business out of a pleasure. Her Bumble Beads bracelets are now so popular on social media that she cannot keep up with orders.

She says, "It started off with me buying beads and charms to make bracelets in small quantities but soon, I was running out of supplies. I learned a lot about managing demand-supply and figuring out profit margins."

Undergraduate student and aspiring singer/song-writer Tashi Cheozum Lama (stage name TASHIII) has also found a therapeutic way to deal with Covid-19. "Music as a profession is emotional. As a musician, I have to isolate myself so I can introspect and write about things I feel deeply about. So, Covid allowed me to transcribe and create New York City Lights," she says about her first single.

New York City Lights debuted internationally on 4 September. She describes it as a soft-guitar ballad, unfiltered and raw. It is available on music streaming services such as Spotify and Amazon Music.

While appreciating the positive role played by Covid to advance her musical career, TASHIII still misses doing live shows: "The downside is that I can't perform live anymore. For majority of artists, live shows are the main source of revenue."

As they struggle with disrupted classes, enterprising students are using the lockdown to turn hobbies into business revenue." 

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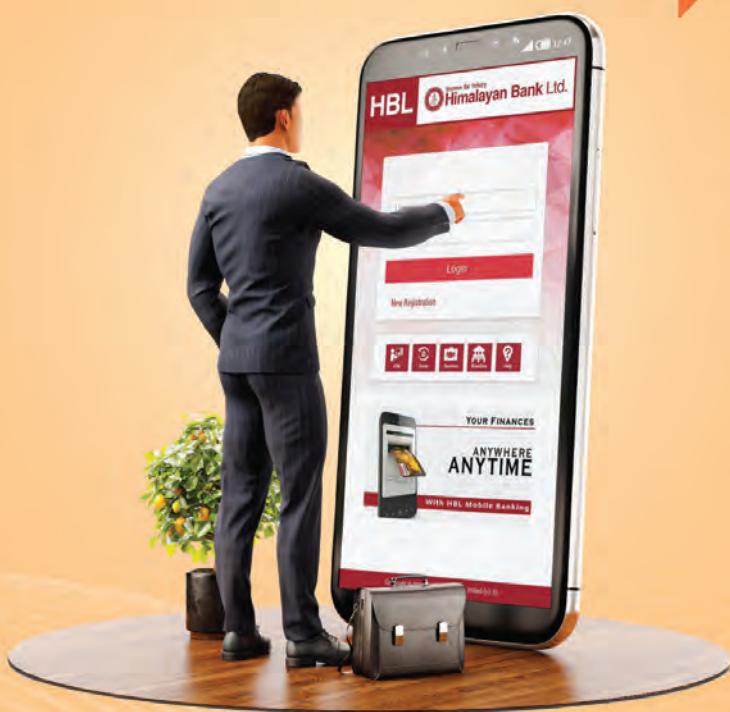
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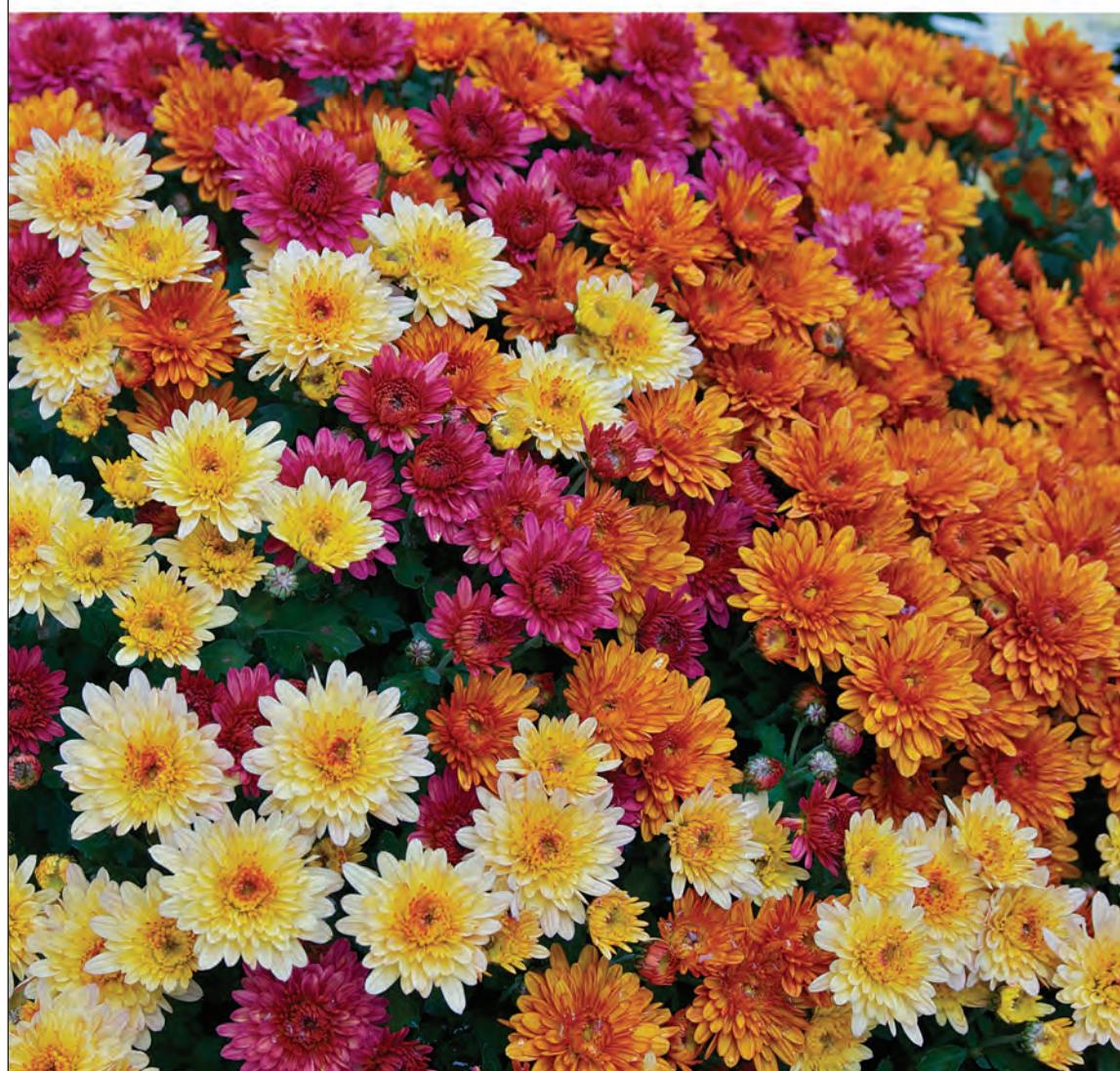
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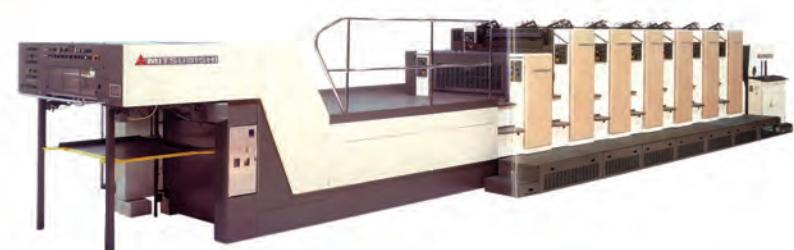


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Saving Nepal's flyway

Let us pledge to protect the trans-Himalayan migratory route of Demoiselle Cranes

It was in Kagbeni in 1980. High above in the deep blue Himalayan sky was a flock of graceful Demoiselle Cranes, flying north riding up-valley winds on their annual migration across the Himalaya. It was my lucky day.

The Kali Gandaki at this point is the deepest gorge in the world, located between two eight thousander peaks, Dhaulagiri and Annapurna I. It provides a passage for migratory birds from the Tibetan Plateau and Siberia to the Subcontinent and back.

Kagbeni is a vantage point to spot migratory birds, and I had visited it multiple times to provide expertise for filming by NHK and



BANNER

Rajendra N Suwal

BBC. Till then, I had never seen the cranes, only watched them on Planet Earth Mountains on Discovery Channel.

Demoiselle Cranes are the third most common crane species after the Sandhill Crane in North America and Eurasian Crane in Europe and Asia. They number over 200,000, and demonstrate spectacular migratory flights.

They breed in the vast expanses of the steppe grasslands of Mongolia and Russia, and fly south across the Tibetan Plateau and the Himalaya to winter in western India.

Unlike other cranes that dwell on wetlands, these cranes prefer relatively dry habitats for survival. Their nests can be found on dry ground around 500m apart from each other.

Prior to migration, the birds flock with their fledglings. Birds from Mongolia and Russia overflying Nepal and Pakistan covering nearly 3,000km one way, and finally converge in western India, where they live in large flocks in their wintering grounds.

They can fly over extreme habitats of the world including the scorching Gobi Desert, the high and dry Tibetan Plateau, the Himalaya with its jet stream, the lush Gangetic Plains and the farms of Western India.

Satellite telemetry studies have recorded a cyclic migration pattern of Demoiselle Cranes, flying over Nepal during autumn and returning



Demoiselle Cranes flying south in autumn along the Kali Gandaki at Kagbeni with Mt Dhaulagiri looming in the background.

via Mongolia in spring. During their autumn migration, birders can see magnificent flocks of Demoiselle over Nepal's high mountain passes, gorges and along the Tarai. Farmers in Nepal often witness flocks flying in V formation like a swaying garland pattern in the sky, and call

it 'karyang kurung' for the sound the make.

In 1972, a flock of Demoiselle even alighted on Tundikhel at the centre of Kathmandu. More recently, I have observed them flying over my office in Baluwatar in 2015, and from my house in

Chetrapati in 2016.

But for these migrating cranes, Kagbeni remains the flight path of choice since the Kali Gandaki serves as a funnel that cuts through the Himalaya. My highest count of the Demoiselle has ranged from 50,000 in 2004 to only 5,000 in 2009.

Variance in counting can be tied to weather, wind and visibility. When the wind in the Himalaya picks up, the flocks descend to lower altitudes. When they have the jet stream on their tails, they ride it over the mountains.

For these expert fliers, the flight

Eurasian Curlew visits Kathmandu after 50 years

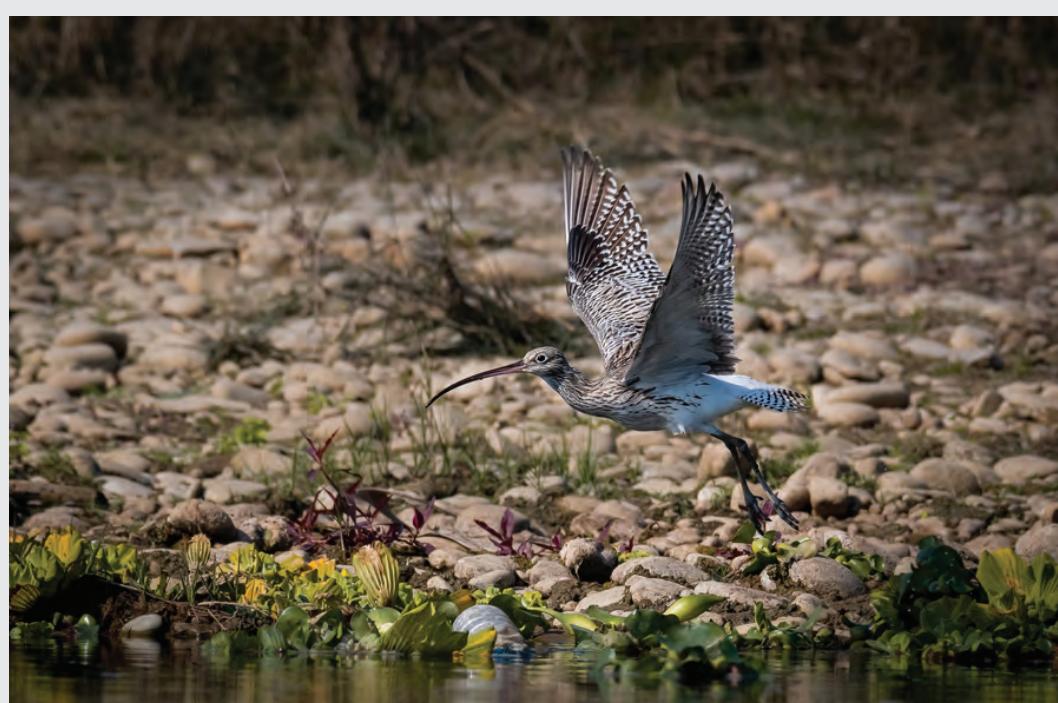
They once used to arrive in flocks of 200 in Kosi Tappu wildlife reserve, and frequent Kathmandu Valley's wetlands. But after their numbers started dwindling sharply, the first Eurasian Curlew has been spotted for the first time after half-a-century by birders in Kathmandu last week.

A group of wildlife photographers were out taking pictures along the Manahara River in Bhaktapur when they spotted a brownish bird with a long curved beak feeding by itself along the shore. They took close-up photographs and showed it to Hem Sagar Baral, an ornithologist

with the Zoological Society London (ZSL) who positively identified it as the Eurasian Curlew.

Sanjay Shrestha and Pemba Sherpa took pictures of the bird on the ground, while others in the group have photos of the bird in flight. What intrigued Baral is that Eurasian Curlews are usually in flocks, and this seemed to be on its own.

The bird used to be a common autumn visitor in Nepal's national parks as they made stopovers in their migrations to and from Siberia and India, and possibly as far away as Africa. The birds of passage even used to make a refueling stop for a few days in Kathmandu Valley, but had not been seen here for 50 years.



Eurasian Curlew spotted in Bhaktapur last week.

BIMITA BHANDARI

for migrating cranes



RAJENDRA N SUWAL

path is determined by head or tail winds, thermals, katabatic winds, and other weather phenomena. Thermals in the wind shadow of the mountains helps them gain altitude.

In Nepal, the southerly daily thermals of the Kali Gandaki valley helps the birds soar up and over the

mountains, whereas, riverbanks, wetlands and farms along the flight path are convenient night stops.

These wetlands connect the dots along the birds' migration routes, and Nepal lies in the Central Asian Flyway. During

CENTRAL ASIAN FLYWAY

Satellite telemetry shows routes three migratory birds take to cross the Himalaya from Mongolia, via Tibet to Nepal and on to India.



bad weather events, the birds use the windswept flood plains of the Kali Gandaki river in Kagbeni and Larjung of Annapurna Conservation Area as a safe stopover, while the buckwheat terraces provide food for their long journeys.

While large in number, these birds still need protection from threats along their migratory routes and stopovers. These include poisoning from pesticide laden seeds, and from epidemics of water borne or airborne diseases.

In Mongolia, the application of the rodenticide Bromadiolone is known to have killed hundreds of Demoiselle Cranes, Steppe Eagles, Saker Falcons and other species. In November last year, 37 Demoiselle were found dead in Jodhpur in India, probably after eating poisoned seeds.

In North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan, crane hunters are the biggest threat during migration.

Metal weights tied to strings are hurled to lasso the cranes as they fly low to clear mountain passes. Traditional hunters in Pakistan often use live cranes as decoys to attract other birds, and keep them as pets.

Ensuring safe and protected wetlands and farms along their migratory routes from Russia, Mongolia, China, Tibet, Pakistan, Nepal to India along the Central Asian Flyway is crucial to ensure the long term survival of these birds.

Legend has it that Lord Buddha's cousin killed a crane, and he was very moved when its mate mourned its death. The scene changed his life by inspiring him to seek a path of non-violence and compassion.

One of the approaches undertaken by WWF, known as the Asian Flyway Initiative, aims to provide safe passage between

the breeding and wintering sites of cranes. Similarly, creating awareness about safe farming practices and promoting bird watching tourism are some of the viable options to help protect Demoiselle Cranes.

The designation of 10 Ramsar Sites, identification of wetlands of international importance for biodiversity in Nepal provides stopover sites for many ducks geese and waders during migration.

Demoiselle Cranes, however, require wide riverbeds and farmlands as stopover sites and wintering habitats. We aim to generate awareness and seek support for the conservation of these legendary migratory species so that they survive into the future.

Rajendra N. Suwal is the Head of Partnerships Development at WWF Nepal.



SANJAYA THA

The bird used to be abundant in Kosi Tappu Wildlife Reserve and has also been spotted lately in Chitwan, but not in large numbers. Eurasian Curlews use their characteristic curved beaks to burrow into wet sand banks after monsoon floods for worms.

The first person to identify a Eurasian Curlew in Kathmandu was the British resident Brian Hodgson in 1844, who reported seeing flocks of them stopping over briefly on their migration. Ornithologist R L Fleming and artist Lain Singh Bangdel in their 1976 book, Birds of Nepal, say the bird is found in Kathmandu Valley. H S Nepali in his unpublished work in 1982, List of Nepalese Bird Specimens, also reports that the bird is found in Kathmandu. However, both bird books probably relied on an earlier sighting in 1970.

Till 20 years ago, Anish Timilsina of the Kosi Tappu Wildlife Reserve remembers seeing flocks of up to 200 stopping by the river banks to feed, usually in the autumn season. They even used to winter there because of the abundance of food. But for the past decade, he said, they come only in groups of three or four,

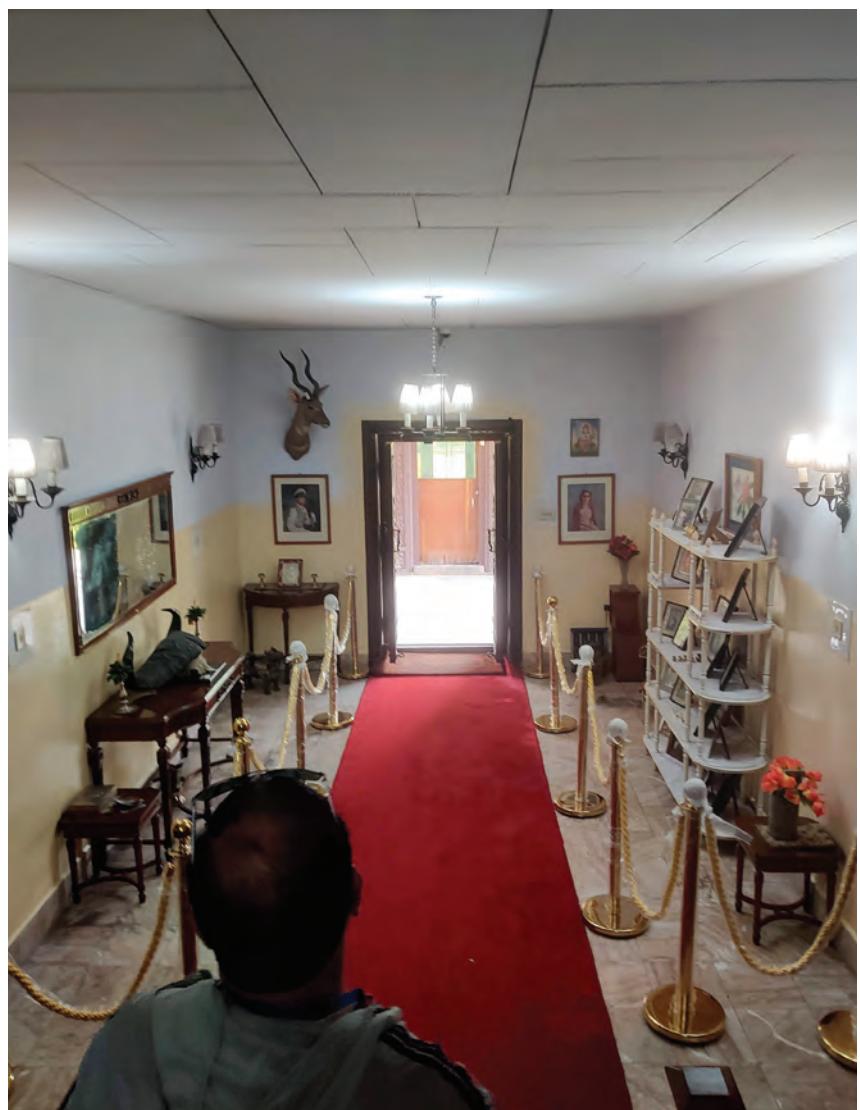
and some years there are none at all.

The International Conservation Union (IUCN) has classified the Eurasian Curlew in the threatened list. Their numbers are also going down in the British Isles, which had up to quarter of the population of the birds, and has not been put on the Red List of endangered birds. The reason is habitat loss as wetlands disappear, water pollution and hunting.

The reasons are similar in Nepal – the loss of wetlands as well as the disappearance of sand banks and mud flats by rivers where the birds prefer to feed. Their numbers could have also dwindled because of hunting and habitat loss in stopovers en route during migration.

The Eurasian Curlew is among five species of migratory birds whose numbers have diminished since 2000, including the Eurasian Spoonbill, Pallas Fish Eagle, Caspian Tern. Some 212 of the 896 bird species found in Nepal are migratory, and 42 of them are globally threatened.

Kamal Maden



Preserving King Birendra's family home

20 years after palace massacre, visitors to Shree Sadan can soon see rooms exactly as they were then



Alisha Sijapati

When Narayanhit Palace was opened to the public in 2009 soon after Nepal was declared a republic, Nepalis flocked in to see what daily life of the royals looked like. They were not impressed.

Many thought they would also see Tribhuvan Sadan, the building where the 2001 family massacre took place in which ten members of the royal family were killed, and which was later demolished.

The pink pagoda shaped building with a tower designed by American architect Benjamin Polk was a ceremonial structure for official functions, and there was not much to see there about the private life of royals.

Now, the Narayanhit Palace Museum is set to open Shree Sadan, King Birendra's private family residence, which has been kept intact since the massacre at 8:45 PM on Friday, 1 June 2001.

Nepali Times got an exclusive sneak preview of Shree Sadan and it is like a time capsule – Prince Nirajan's room still has his class timetable stuck to the wall, the alcove bar has King Birendra's favourite brandy, and in the bedroom is a small cot where the king's beloved German Shepherd, Jit, used to sleep.

"Everything is the same as it was 20 years ago, we wanted it

to be as it was, a place where our king, queen, princes and princesses walked, this place holds attachment, and tampering with the memories would be a disservice to Nepal's history," says Buddhi Bahadur Gurung as he walks through the dark and slightly musty-smelling rooms.

This is an emotional project for 54-year-old Gurung, who worked closely with King Birendra ever since he was employed at the royal palace at the age of 21. He is now entrusted with sprucing up Shree Sadan so it can be added to the Narayanhit Museum once the Covid-19 crisis is over.

Despite the coronavirus restrictions, workers have used the past four months preserving the artefacts in Shree Sadan, while taking care not to disturb anything in the rooms. The building lies between the current museum and the Republic Memorial to the east.

Entering the lush driveway, visitors will be reminded that this was the route King Birendra took every day as he went to and from his office with Jit. There is a deep stillness in the air, and Shree Sadan has a raw and foreboding look.

Gurung remembers King Birendra as a simple man with plain tastes, and did not want an ostentatious building: "He preferred it this way, he loved the natural charm of the brick and tiles."

Crown Prince Dipendra did not live in Shree Sadan because royal tradition demanded that he stay separately from his parents once he turned 18. He had moved to Tribhuvan Sadan, where the shooting of the royal family took place in 2001 during a regular royal family dinner gathering.

Birendra had also moved out of the home of his father, King Mahendra, when he turned 18. That is when he built the 3-storey and 12-room Shree Sadan for himself.

The main door leads to a red carpeted hallway and a double staircase with a portrait of the extended royal family on the left. The shelf centres a painting of King Birendra's mother, Queen Indra – her immaculate beauty captured on a crystal frame. In contrast, the hallway also has some grisly taxidermy heads of bears, deer and mountain goats along the wall, a life-size mirror reflecting them.

The ground floor has the study of King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya, which was Crown Prince Dipendra's bedroom before he moved out in 1988.

The living room has portraits of Dipendra, Princess Shruti and Prince Nirajan, and the dining hall has a large brown marble table under a blue ceiling where only the family was allowed.

Off the dining area is a small alcove bar where King Birendra sometimes hosted his brothers for

after-dinner drinks and a cigar. He would pour himself a brandy, and fix drinks for Prince Gyanendra and Prince Dhirendra.

Upstairs, the first floor leads to the King and Queen's personal chambers and the hallway has oil-on-canvas paintings of landscapes and wildlife by Princess Shruti, an accomplished artist herself.

To the left is a common living room, with blue themed walls and furniture. There is a bulky cathode-ray Sony tv set and a stereo with cassette tapes in a corner. This area leads to Queen Aishwarya's vanity room where there is a small dressing area with a three-sided mirror table, a partition for changing. Adjoining it is a *punya kotha* (prayer room).

To the right on the first floor is the personal room of the King and Queen which is modest, almost frugal. A 1990s National tv set faces a king-sized bed attached to a mirror that goes up to the ceiling. The side table has a dial telephone along with a framed image of Khatpad Baba. The bathrooms are simple with pink tiles, a bathtub, a small mirror and an ordinary sink.

Next to the door is a small cot for King Birendra's favourite pet, Jit the German Shepherd. Jit died soon after the royal massacre. "It was depression," Gurung says.

Princess Shruti and Prince Nirajan lived on the second floor. To the right of the hallway is Nirajan's chamber: his study room,

Royal House

King Birendra designed this three-storey cottage named Shree Sadan for his family when he was Crown Prince. It will soon be open to the public, and has preserved the rooms exactly like it was when the entire royal family was killed in a massacre in 2001.

The living room, bedrooms, dining hall and even the bar alcove show the king's simple lifestyle and plain taste.

King Birendra walks with Queen Aishwarya and his favourite pet, Jit, in 2000 (below, left).

The royal family in 1991 (below, right). All five were killed in the palace massacre of 2001.

bedroom and a small terrace with a punching bag, where he often practiced boxing. Nirajan was 23 when he was killed.

The Prince's study room had stickers of cartoon characters Goofy and Mickey Mouse. He has a collection of Laughing Buddha figures on his shelf, and picture frames on the wall. Everything is as it was 20 years ago – even Nirajan's class schedule for Kathmandu Management College pinned to the wall and a weekly schedule printed in dot matrix: 'Wake up at 6.30 and head to bed by 23.00. Friday wake up at 10 am and FRIDAY NIGHT from 19.00 to 23.00.'

Princess Shruti's room is different. She was two years older than Nirajan, and it is more feminine: pink flowered closets, family portraits, single bed, study table with VCR tapes which she often shared with her brother. In the driveway below Shree Sadan are three small toy cars – black, red and white – in which the three siblings often played when they were children.

The opening of Shree Sadan has been delayed by the pandemic and bureaucratic hurdles. But Director of the Narayanhit Palace Museum Bhesh Narayan Dahal says they are being sorted out: "Yes there were a lot of delays and mismanagement, but we don't want to wait any further. There is much more of an emotional connection with the royal family in Shree Sadan and it is a searing memory of the tragedy."

Because of his links to the royal family, Gurung was disappointed that visitors were not happy with the ceremonial palace and its exhibits. But he is confident that Shree Sadan will be a much more intimate addition to the museum.

There are other sections of the palace that are still out of bounds. Trishul Sadan to the east of the main palace has a salon, medication room, gymnasium, indoor swimming pool and private rooms of the prince and princesses. It has not been opened because it is part of the Mahendra Manil, still the private residence of Queen Mother Ratna who is now 92, and was allowed to live there after 2008.

Gurung says that although King Birendra had winter and summer palaces in Chitwan, Pokhara and Nagarjun, his favourite was always Shree Sadan, a place where he truly felt at home and where he liked to relax while gardening and reading.

Narayanhit is named after the Malla-era water spouts near the Narayan Temple. Prime Minister Bir Shumshere Rana, who had his daughter marry King Prithvi Bir Bikram Shah, made a palace for the king as a dowry in the late 19th century.

However, that neo-classical palace was destroyed in the 1934 earthquake and King Tribhuvan rebuilt the house called Tribhuvan Sadan -- the building where the massacre took place.

Says Buddhi Bahadur Gurung: "We look forward to welcoming visitors to this museum after the COVID-19 crisis. We have put our heart and soul into it to preserve it just as it was two decades ago on the day of the tragedy."



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Price of electric cars now

The same Cabinet meeting on 1 October that decided to nominate Yubaraj Khatiwada as Nepal's new ambassador to the United States also partially reversed a hefty tax increase on electric cars that he announced as finance minister in May.

But the tax reversal is not going to bring down the price of

options will now have a price tag of approximately Rs3 million.

Electric SUVs like the Hyundai Kona or the Kia Niro with higher kW that used to cost Rs6.6 million before the budget, shot up to Rs9.5 million, but may now fall to just Rs8.5 million depending on the mark-up. This could be about the same as the petrol or diesel versions of the



electric vehicles by much, and the higher capacity battery-powered cars would remain almost as expensive.

The prime minister's office was under public opinion pressure ever since the budget announcement that raised the tax on electric vehicles, so they had to show that they were doing something.

In May, Khatiwada's budget increased the price of small and mid-sized electric vehicles by 55-59%, but the revision brings the price down by only 17%.

In other words, the price of an electric vehicle like the Mahindra e2O that used to cost Rs2.6 million after taxes were slashed in 2016, went up to Rs3.6 million after the budget tax increase this year. With last week's revision, the same model with the same

same SUVs.

The rationale supporting a shift to electric cars is logical: 15% of Nepal's total imports go to buy petroleum products from India totalling Rs215 billion annually. Even if this could be reduced by 10% it will mean considerable savings for the country. This in turn will lessen air pollution in urban centres, and with the Covid-19 scare, air quality could be a life-or-death issue.

After the budget announcement, there are 450 vehicles still stuck at customs and the International Container Port in Birganj. Importers had been waiting for a government decision to revise the tax, but now have no option but to clear the vehicles.

The extra cost will be passed down to customers who had booked the vehicles, and some of them will be paying up to 50% more than they would otherwise have. Some buyers have cancelled their orders.

Before the budget in May, electric cars only had to pay 10% excise and 13% VAT, minimal customs duty, and the Rs30,000 annual road tax was waived. This had led to a dramatic spurt in electric car sales in Nepal because they were more competitive than fossil-fuel cars which are taxed at 260%.

However, the budget in May raised the total tax for electric vehicles to between 120-140%, which priced battery cars higher than a petrol or diesel car of the same size. Electric vehicles of peak power 50-100kW had to pay 40% excise, 50% if it was 100-150kW. The excise went up to 60% for battery cars with peak power of 150-200kW.

But although last week's Cabinet decision reduced the tax on smaller capacity e-vehicles by 80% of the increased amount, and by 75% for cars in the 40% excise bracket, there were only minimal reductions for cars with higher kW.

Says Cabinet Shrestha, whose Agni Group represents India's Mahindra, makers of the e2o: "Electric vehicle sales were picking up, we thought there was a bright future. But Nepal has gone back five years."

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माघापुरुच्छे बैंक

सबल, उत्कृष्ट एवं विस्तारित

The reconstructed royal pond is beginning to resemble what it must have looked like 350 years ago

Suvexa Pradhan Tuladhar

Five years after the earthquake destroyed its central temple, the 350-year-old Rani Pokhari royal pond at the centre of Kathmandu is finally getting back its original look.

The temple had been rebuilt after previous earthquakes in the Moghul stucco dome style, and was going to be converted into a concrete-lined structure. But today, the shrine, the causeway and pond perimeter gleam with russet brick.

Rani Pokhari has gone through many avatars in the past centuries. The earliest, an engraving commemorating the visit to Kathmandu by Prince Waldemar of Prussia in 1845, shows the Balgopaleswar Temple having a Shikhara style spire. After it came down in an earthquake, Jang Bahadur Rana had it rebuilt with the Moghul dome architecture of north India that he admired so much.

This structure came down again in the 1934 mega-quake, and Juddha Sumsher Rana had it reconstructed and whitewashed, adding a metal fence around the pond. This structure, too, was destroyed in the 2015 earthquake, and Kathmandu Mayor Bidya Sundar Shakya's attempt to surround the pond with cafes and shops was vehemently opposed by the local community.

Finally, the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA) is giving Rani Pokhari more or less its original look. After delays due to the lockdown, reconstruction is finally nearing completion.

The pond was built in 1671 by King Pratap Malla after his consort, Queen Anantapriya was devastated by the sudden death of her son, Prince Chakrawatendra Malla. The king could not bear to see his queen so distraught, so he built Rani Pokhari to soothe her, and memorialise their lost son.

It was an exquisite architectural and ecological masterpiece showcasing the meticulous craftsmanship of the Malla era. The pond was consecrated with the crystal clear waters from 51 sacred sites from all over the subcontinent.



Building back Rani Pokhari even better

On the south side of the pond there still stands a statue of an elephant bearing King Pratap Malla and his two sons Chakrawatendra and Mahipatendra. Four smaller temples protect the central temple from the four cardinal points.

Besides its beauty, the pond was also an engineering feat. It was fed by an intricate underground network of channels to keep it full throughout the year. It also served to manage the surface water around in the area during monsoon, so that runoff from as far as Asan market would empty into the pond and overflow past farmlands down to Tukucha Rivulet in the east.

Because Rani Pokhari recharged ground water, it kept the water sources like *hitis* and wells in the surroundings flowing even in the dry season. The pond bed was lined with semi-permeable black clay (*dyo cha*) so it retained water but also allowed some of it to seep through. The pond thus served as a rainwater reservoir that not just replenished groundwater, but also irrigated nearby farms.

"Rani Pokhari shaped the water management system around the area at that time," says Sudarshan

Tiwari, professor at the Institute of Engineering and a conservation architect.

Kathmandu Valley traditionally had an urban-rural symbiosis with densely-packed towns situated on higher ground, with intensive farming in the fertile soil below. The pond is a reminder of the wisdom of Kathmandu's rulers who understood this ecological balance, as well as its cultural significance.

"Since the day of its inauguration the pond was already considered a sacred site due to the temple in the centre and because water from 51 holy places were ceremonially poured into it," says heritage conservationist Alok Siddhi Tuladhar.

After it was damaged again in the 2015 earthquake, President Bidya Devi Bhandari inaugurated the reconstruction of Rani Pokhari in January 2016. The Kathmandu Metropolitan City got a budget of Rs120 million for the job, but it started to line the perimeter with cement for shops, and used concrete to rebuild the temple. After opposition, the work was stopped and handed over to the NRA.

"We wanted to make sure

everyone involved had a say in the reconstruction, as the NRA is just a temporary organisation, so we formed a committee consisting of people from KMC, Department of Archaeology and local experts," explained the NRA's Sushil Gyewali.

After much debate the NRA decided to rebuild the temple in the original 1671 Shikhara style, and also revive the original hydrological elements used in the pond. This was not an easy job. Experts from Bhaktapur were brought in to line the pond with black clay and bricks.

The biggest challenge was to revive the previous water management system. The artesian wells and underground channels that fed the pond have dried up or have been destroyed by surrounding building construction.

"We will do our best to fill the pond through natural means but we will have to take extreme measures if the plan fails," explained Gyewali.

One of those "extreme measures" was to start filling the pond last week with muddy water from a nearby tube well. But this was also stopped after local opposition.

"It was a mistake. Rani Pokhari

is a holy site and using tubewell water diminishes its religious, cultural and ecological value," said Tuladhar. The NRA stopped using the tubewell water, but Gyewali says that even the heavy monsoon rains will not be enough to fill the pond.

Other options are to use the trial feed from the Melamchi tunnel, or rainwater harvesting from the reconstructed Darbar High School and Tri Chandra College.

Another problem might be that the bed of the pond is lined with trapezoid *dachhi appa* bricks and the gaps between them could over time be blocked by debris and prevent seepage of water for recharging.

"This will not only defeat the purpose of recharging the underground channels but it will also make the pond dirty, so money has to be spent in cleaning it," says Sudarshan Tiwari.

Despite the compromises during its reconstruction, Rani Pokhari has become a symbol of what proper restoration should look like. Relentless activism and communities uniting to preserve this heritage has saved Kathmandu's past for its future. ■

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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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Kokroma designer masks

Masks unmasked

Fashion meets function as Nepal's social entrepreneurs jump into the mask market

Suvexa Pradhan Tuladhar

To wear or not to wear masks has become an ideological issue in some countries, but here in Kathmandu wearing them is now the law as the number of Covid-19 cases shoots up in the capital.

There is a Rs100 fine on anyone caught in public without a mask. But Kathmandu residents did not need much persuasion — they were already in the habit of wearing masks outdoors because of the air pollution.

Nepal's entrepreneurs and fashion companies are following the worldwide trend to turn masks into an essential item of clothing. The more creative ones are making designer masks for those who want to make a fashion statement while covering their faces.

Businesses in Kathmandu have repurposed their workflow to produce masks. Some companies making trekking gear have switched to personal protective equipment, garment manufacturers cannot produce cloth masks fast enough to meet demand, and fashion companies are producing more expensive designer masks.

Goldstar, Nepal's fast-growing footwear manufacturer, released its latest face mask line called MeroMask. It has several models, with or without valves and different price ranges.

Kolpa Store has its own range of masks that are elegant and functional. Metro-Mask has been producing masks for health-conscious Nepalis even before the pandemic, and it has had to just speed up production and switch to a different filter.

"The demand for MetroMask has grown tremendously ever since the threat of the virus," says Tashi Gyalzen Sherpa, CEO of Metro-Mask.

Any type of mask will help in protection to some level, health experts say, but some masks are better than others. Metro-Mask has stopped making

its signature masks that were designed to stop dust and soot particles in Kathmandu air, and now focuses solely on producing high-tech industrial masks like N95 and KN95.

Earlier pollution protection masks had valves to allow wearers to exhale more easily. These are not recommended for coronavirus because although they protect the wearer, the masks put others around them at risk.

Experts also say that surgical masks are better at protection from the virus than a cloth mask. So while fashionable masks are a quirky accessory, buyers may want to reconsider if the cloth mask is worth the cost, when a simple surgical mask would do a better job.

According to a study on the effectiveness of cloth masks versus medical masks, the infection rate was the highest in cloth masks compared to any other medical masks. If a cloth mask is being worn, it should be washed frequently to keep them clean.

Cotton Mill Nepal, which was producing high-end household linen items is offering a family pack of colourful face masks in three sizes for the whole family. The masks can be ordered online through daraz.com.

Similarly, Kokroma which makes baby clothing and accessories for export and the home market, is now also making cloth masks.

Another social entrepreneurship company, Sabah Nepal, which has a network of 3,000 home-based women members all over the country to develop craft and food-based products, has been contracted by UNDP Nepal to make 40,000 cloth masks. The arrangement provides income for the women as well as produce protective item that is in short supply. Meanwhile, Hemp Nepal, which produces fabric from the hemp plant to be turned into clothing items, cushion covers and even shoes, is also turning its attention to making masks. Hemp is said to be a breathable fabric with insulating and anti-bacterial properties.

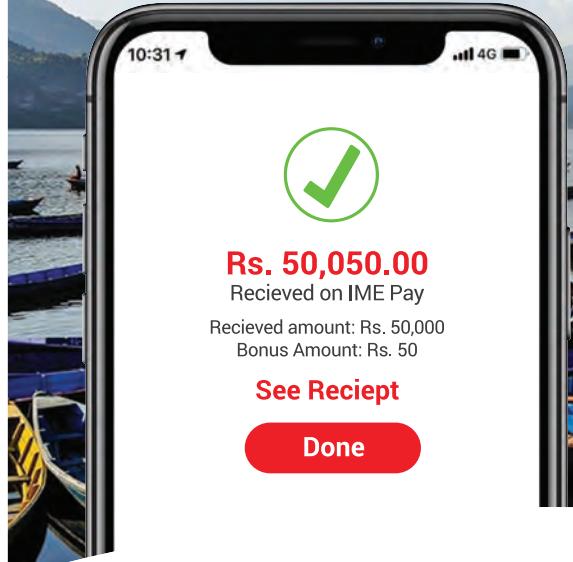
One mask that stands out for its colourful range of designer masks is Groomin. With its motto 'Style and safety', Groomin offers ladies' face covers that are elegant while at the same time having three layers of filters with adjustable ear loops. A3-pack costs Rs1,000.

At Metro-Mask Tashi Gyalzen Sherpa seems to be preparing to meet this growth in demand for both simple as well as fancier masks. He says: "We are slowly going to transition into making cooler looking high-tech masks."

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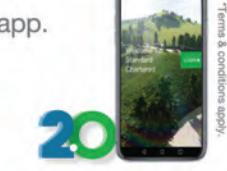


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Kathmandu homes and hotels turn into hospitals

Nepal's capital has run out of affordable ICU care for its Covid-19 patients

Sonia Awale

As government and private hospitals in Kathmandu fill up with Covid-19 patients, some of them are offering rented hotel rooms or home care to meet the surge of the seriously sick. Even then, these extensions of the hospitals can only cater to patients with milder symptoms, and there is no room in the ICUs if their condition gets worse.

The government has now officially allowed hospitals to start moving patients with mild symptoms to hotels in Kathmandu as long as they do not have non-coronavirus guests.

After it got filled up with SARS-CoV-2 patients, Star Hospital in Lalitpur came up with the 'Housepital' service under which it sends people with mild symptoms to self-isolate at home, provide regular tele-consultation, three times a day vitals monitoring, blood tests and dietary and psychiatric consultations. The basic care package costs Rs12,500, while a more advanced treatment that includes essential medical kits and hands-on care is Rs30,000 for 14 days of isolation.

"There has been a steady increase in people coming for our Housepital service, we now get about three patients a day," says Pratikchy Dhakal of Star Hospital, adding that in case of complication, individuals are admitted to the hospital if a bed is available.

Ideally, asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic people self-isolating at homes should have a separate room and a bathroom. Patients should confine themselves in their room, wash their own utensils, wear mask while going to the toilet and sanitise it after use and wipe door and other handles.

Individuals need to keep track of their temperature and symptoms, measure oxygen saturation level if possible, take paracetamol for body ache and fever and make sure to eat nutritious food. One must be aware of danger signs: oxygen level below 93, chest pain, difficulty in breathing and blue tint to lips and limbs.

"None of what is happening now is unexpected, and we did have quite a while to prepare but it was not well planned. Now it is extremely difficult for all of us," says pulmonary specialist Rakshya Pande of HAMS hospital. "None-the-less, if asymptomatic and mild symptomatic people follow safe home isolation, it will help break the chain of transmission."

Some asymptomatic people who have tested positive but live in crowded joint family homes have now started moving to hotels for self-isolation. The Hotel Association of Nepal has designated 80 of its properties in Kathmandu as quarantine hotels at Rs5,000 per night, and at Rs7,000



BHANU BHATTARAI

if two people share a room with four meals a day.

For all intents and purposes, Kathmandu has now reached a saturation point for Covid-19 patients, and with Dasain and winter approaching, the dangers will multiply. Even the government seems to now have thrown up its hands, and left it up to citizens to take care of themselves.

"We are now in a situation where symptomatic patients are being sent home, and rationing hospital beds, oxygen and ventilators, that is like being caught between the devil and the deep blue sea," says Buddha Basnyat, a physician at the Patan Academy of Health Sciences.

The winter flu season and increased pollution will add to the respiratory complications due to Covid-19 and there might be another explosive surge, warns Basnyat. "For now, because therapies and vaccines are not yet available, prevention is the best medicine."

Some of this shortage could be artificial. Kathmandu Valley's government and private hospitals have 195 ICU beds and 88 ventilators, of which 154 are presently occupied and 50 ventilators are being used by patients with Covid-19 or other chronic ailments.

There are an estimated 2,600 ICU beds in private and government hospitals nationwide, and only 490 ventilators of the 900 are in working order. As of Thursday, there were 314 patients being treated in ICUs and 68 of them were on ventilator support. Bagmati province alone had 175 patients in ICU and 56 on ventilators.

For some doctors, the problem is not so much a shortage of ICU beds and ventilators, but the fact that they are either too expensive for most patients, or they are not where they are needed the most. They say ventilators are important, but less than 3% of seriously ill Covid-19 patients in Nepal who need ventilator support make it.

Says Buddha Basnyat:
"Our focus should now be on strengthening nursing care and

supplying adequate oxygen, which are more important than ventilators, and for patients that

need oxygen to be administered the cheap but effective drug dexamethasone."

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Dasain Postponed

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

It is hereby notified to all concerned that this year's Dasain Festival has been postponed. The festival was originally supposed to be held in five phases starting 17 October, but has been put off because everyone has been locked up. All concerned should watch this space for new dates, but expect it to be held in April 2022, or thereabouts when it will be celebrated in conjunction with the end of the world as we know it. Goats and buffalos earmarked for martyrdom will now be allowed to carry on with their daily lives until such time as they may again be required to be decapitated in the epic struggle of good against evil. For further information, contact the Department of Human Sacrifices.



No, wait, make that next year some time.

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