The demise of the print media, it seems, was exaggerated. Paper newspapers were in crisis even before Covid-19 because of loss of advertising, and the migration of eyeballs to the Internet. In Nepal, TV viewership overtook radio listeners in 2019 for the first time, and commercials abandoned print for television.

Many had predicted that the pandemic would be the final nail in the coffin of the print media. And struggling media companies in Nepal abandoned their print editions in March as the lockdown went into force — some temporarily, others more permanently.

Newsrooms cut staff and slashed overheads as revenues plummeted. Advertising in their online editions did not have the yield to sustain the business. However, as our report on page 14 shows, most media companies have resumed their hardcopy editions. This paper in your hands has restarted publication on 1 January 2021 after 10 months.

“Print newspapers are not going to die because it is something physical that stays with you, there are things you can do with design and use of space on the page that is much more powerful than looking at a small phone screen,” says Amar Gurung, CEO at Himalmedia, which publishes Nepali Times.

Besides the size and flexibility with design, surveys have shown that a hardcopy publication carries more trust with readers, especially in the age of fake news. Even though only 7% in a sample survey nationwide said they read printed newspapers, these are mostly decision-makers in positions of power. The printed word, therefore, has more political and economic clout.

Alisha Sijapati

Print is back

The print media as it existed 10 years ago is dead. But the content and role of newspapers have changed. Ironically, what appears to have saved print is the proliferation of digital portals, where both news and advertisement tend to be drowned out by the cacophony. To stand out from the crowd, advertisers now prefer a printed paper page.

“Print media still helps to create certain level of credibility in communications. With excess noise in digital, and its unregulated content, many people are not sure how much they can trust it. Print provides trust,” says Punam Singh of the Golchha Group which is the distributor of Bajaj motorcycles.

Owners of papers that went paperless in 2020 realised that they were missing out on revenue, as well as a segment of well-heeled readership. Indeed, across the world there is a return to print advertising by companies turned off by the over-saturation of online, and people disabling relentless algorithm-driven targeted advertising.

This is not to say that the print medium is not without challenges. Overheads are higher because there are additional paper, printing, distribution costs. The content, design and production values have to be of extremely high quality to exceed the impact of a digital page. Visibility has to be high, and distribution reliable so the brand stands out.

Advertisers are looking for reach, and to be associated with the prestige of a print brand. As a bonus, hardcopy gives advertisers longer shelf-life, and readers the convenience of pleasurable and leisurely reading.
Online Packages

Labour recruiter netted in sting raid

A recruiting agency Manipal International that was changing things from rural Nepalis has been caught red-handed in an undercover operation. Read the story behind the sting operation on pages 13 and 14 and watch videos of DOF officers raid the call centre.

Most read and shared on Facebook

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

Pandemic of poverty

Results from a recent nationwide survey show that more than half of Newari households are at risk of falling back into poverty because of loss of jobs and income during 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As it is the people who are affected the most.

This newspaper has been tracking the outcomes of the Covid-19 crisis that were conducted in Nepal in May, July, August and October. It is a sobering reminder that while the national leadership was focused in a fight to finish in Kathmandu, the state has left Nepalis (especially the most vulnerable) to fend for themselves in dealing with the health and economic impact of the Covid-19 crisis.

The strictest finding was that 42% of households in Nepal have no earnings at all, and a further 10% have a combined monthly family income of less than Rs10,000. This means the official figure for Nepal’s population living below the poverty line will need to be drastically revised.

The National Planning Commission’s 2014 survey of the Multidimensional Poverty Index showed that the incidence of poverty had fallen from nearly 60% in 2006 to 28.6% in 2014 – largely because household incomes rose due to remittances. With the Covid crisis, Nepal’s poverty rate may have climbed back to the 15 years ago at the end of the conflict.

The Unicef survey shows that the incidence of household income by being deprived of adequate food, health care and education. In August, 34% of parents cited food among the top three needs of their children, and by October this had dropped to 38%. One in five children still say they have to struggle to feed their children. The situation has remained the same since August, and hunger was more prevalent in Provinces 1, 2 and Lumbini. Inflation, and loss of income were cited as causes.

To a certain extent, educational needs of children appeared to be met in October with 81% of households saying that their children were involved in some form of studying – most of them at home. Less than 15% were attending physical classes, 23% were self-learning. However, in Sudurpaschim and Province 2, a quarter of children said their children were not attending school at all.

Survey results tell us to be dry and impassible. But hope is the thought of how the numbers are still, it is too much to hope that in 2021, Nepal’s rulers will take steps to reverse this neglect?

Santosh Shah was born in Nepal?

Despite his achievements, MasterChef Professional 2020 final Santosh Shah got penalised for his light bias in Nepal about ethnic, religious, and caste. And the details about the symbolic of a non-intervening state for some. A Nepali can take the online discussion.

Most commented

Robert G Powell, 1948-2020

According to police, Santosh Shah was one of the best contestants ever. He was kind, interesting, self-deprecating and an amazing cook. Santosh Shah was born in Nepal, 'Asha Gajurel, nepalitimes.com.' He details about Nepal were full of love and charm, he should be Nepal’s new ambassador because he definitely said Nepal to me. And I loved his cap.

Nicky Simpson

Santosh never said he was cooking a Nepali dish. He always stated that it was ‘inspired by Nepal’. He used ingredients many people had never before, including the delicious rice. I think he did a very genuine and terrific job by flying the flag for Nepal. As a country that many of the viewers in the UK probably very little know about.

Marianne Heredge

Santosh Shah and I got entangled in the fault lines in Nepal. Our ke garne dhamal was a plan for a free, fair and peaceful election. The control has, he distanced the election.

‘It was necessary to establish a non-intervening state for some. A Nepali can take the online discussion.’

Most visited online page

Quote tweets

Nepal Times

 (%) of 2020. The fall in people in Kathmandu to see the rise in the branches.

Sanuk Singh

‘What you did was the best we have ever had from the current election. The earlier one that we had in 2021, and 2021 elections were, for example, a year for a new party,’said Mr. Nepal

Bhawani S考上Shrestha

‘That’s the problem. We keep accepting these bastard garne of the garne which is 2021, and 2021 elections were, for example, a year for a new party. They still, but we give them a new garne.

Durbar Sharad Shrestha

‘One thing I don’t know for sure, with the same, garne they are all in the garne, the garne is the garne to change. The garne, the garne to change.

Kathu Gagan

The story of three successful Nepali public health expert, US government officials and research assistance in Nepal, the University of Michigan, and the UNICEF office

Most popular on Twitter
A NEW YEAR

A NEW CHAPTER

Write a new story every day

HAPPY NEW YEAR

TURKISH AIRLINES
Journalists reflect on a year of crisis coverage

How Asian journalists were forced to make adjustments to cover the pandemic

Pratibha Tuladhar

The first person infected with SARS-CoV-2 was in Wuhan as far back as December 2019, but it was not until late January that there was international concern, and it was finally declared a pandemic in February. In the thick of it was Nepali journalist Binek Bhandari, working at Shanghai-based Sixth Tone as news editor. “My last day in the office was on 23 January before the weeklong Lunar New Year holiday,” Bhandari recalls. “It was cold and drizzling when I left work that evening. We had already been writing extensively about the novel coronavirus, and the holidays were grim.”

Shanghai was not just deserted, but there was an air of despair and fear hanging over the city. Bhandari and his colleagues coveting the holiday shift were told to work from home.

“We were all living in the unknown, trying to figure out what the news the next day would bring,” says Bhandari, who flew to Nepal in February and was supposed to go back on 31 March. By then, Nepal was in lockdown and all flights halted. He was stuck in Kathmandu till September.

In Nepal itself, journalists were also forced to adapt. Bhawana Gurung and Asha Thapa decided to use the lockdown period to start a podcast from their home to disseminate health information.

“I live with my brother so he set up the camera with my phone and all,” says Cabal. “My Viber app served as the teleprompter because the scripts from the producer would be posted there.”

Also a professor at the University of Philippines, Cabal says her broadcasts were punctuated by signal hiccups. She also had to do her own make-up while broadcasting from home and the coffee that constantly accompanied her in the live studio, was missing.

But the media industry has adapted well to the situation, she says, “When there’s a typhoon, a civilian stays away, but the opposite is true for journalists. We go where the typhoon is supposed to make landfall. These are the kind of events journalists are trained for.”

The ‘infodemic’ and disinformation that accompanied the pandemic have been other major challenges for the media industry, as online time went up globally.

“During the lockdown, getting access to information is difficult. While we focus on the pandemic, there are many other, equally important issues that we could miss out on,” says Bhutan’s Jigme Thinley.

Which is why the pandemic has made the job of journalists all the more important, Ruth Cabal says, adding: “It is up to journalists to portray the information and be aggressive in trying to interview the right people to give accurate information.”

While the medium they work in may be different, journalists across Asia have been driving towards the same goal: sharing information that brings relief and hope to the public, sometimes at the cost of their own psychological and physical wellbeing.

“It’s probably one of the biggest stories of our times globally. This means that a lot of journalists may have had to work relentlessly and with limited resources. We’ve heard stories about burnouts and then some pretty disheartening news about the layoffs,” says Binek Bhandari, the Nepali journalist in Shanghai.

“Everywhere there is news, there are challenges. In India, 44 journalists died during the pandemic. This is true for journalists. We go where the typhoon is supposed to make landfall. These are the kind of events journalists are trained for.”

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**Himal-Pahad-Tarai**

Inspired by the international climate movement such as Fridays for Future, the youths used to organise ‘Friday’s Strike’ where young activists sit in front of Parliament and other public spaces every Friday to protest against the lack of action on the climate crisis. The team is currently leading a national campaign called Red Alert Nepal to foster climate action awareness among children and youth and get them engaged in shaping their own future through climate actions.

Although street gatherings had to be suspended because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the climate action group continued with its campaigns. The national coordinator for NYCA, Shreya KC says, “In a sense, the momentum we were gaining in getting youth involved in climate action in Nepal was dissipated by the coronavirus crisis. Which is why we shifted the movement to virtual gatherings.”

KC says it has been a steep learning curve, and there are pros and cons of online activism. “The benefit is that we have been able to connect with people from all over Nepal and the world. However, limited bandwidth and an unstable internet have been challenging.”

At age 22, KC has been a key member of NYCA for the past four years, she spends most of her time learning and advocating as a climate activist, and was a delegate at the UN Climate Change Conference, COP25 which was moved from Santiago to Madrid last year because of unrest in Chile. “Sometimes I get demotivated when the leaders turn a deaf ear to us. However, working closely with other youth from all over the country, I feel empowered and optimistic,” KC adds.

Nepal is party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and has ratified the Paris Agreement, and to help the process NYCA is pulling together ‘Youth Priorities’ to contribute to Nepal’s climate action plan.

“If the leaders hear our appeals and include youth-led priorities, that will be a historical achievement to all of us fighting to preserve a future, we are hopeful,” she says. The visibility of the youth climate movement on social media has created a feedback loop so that more in and around the capital and young Nepalis are getting involved. While Mingma Nuru Sherpa is from the high mountains, Shreya KC is from the Kathmandu Valley. Gaurav Thakur, also 22, is from Janakpur in the Tarai – making it a truly तहखचौलो initiative.

Thakur’s interest is in climate resilient agriculture so that farmers in Nepal’s grain basket in the plains are protected from erratic monsoons and extreme weather events due to global warming. He is worried about what could happen to farming communities in the Tarai, who have to face floods, droughts, even tornados and locust invasions.

After years of attention only on the north and southern polar regions, the international community is now focusing on the ‘Third Pole’, as the Himalaya is called. Youth activists admit Nepal is suffering disproportionately from the effects of the climate crisis, but it also needs to do more to reduce its dependence on petroleum – something which has not just to help protect the planet but also to save its own economy.

Nepal’s youth climate activist like Sherpa, KC and Thakur know that they have to step in because it is their future that is at stake. They will now also advise the UN on the climate emergency, providing perspectives, ideas and solutions. As a result of the inadequacy of climate action from present government and leaders globally as well as nationally, the voices of powerful young people positioning themselves as leaders, are demanding stronger action. A ray of hope is the presence that the United States will rejig the Paris Climate Agreement in 2021.

Climate change activism is not a new development in Nepal, but the role of youth at this scale today, is says KC: “The process of change is slow but our generation is louder and demand more action and less talk.”

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**Nepal economy 2021**

After a year of stagnation due to the Covid-19 crisis, Nepal’s economy has just started getting back on track and the money overseas is now starting to pump in, when political uncertainty once more threatens to derail it. If scrap metal prices go up in April-May next year it will be a big hole in the budget. There is no lack of money in Nepal, what the country lacks is the capacity to spend. Foreign exchange reserves are at a record 14 months of imports, the balance of payments has big hole in the budget. There is no lack of money in Nepal, what the country lacks is the capacity to spend. Foreign exchange reserves are at a record 14 months of imports, the balance of payments has been robust despite the pandemic. However, prolonged political uncertainty will hurt investment and infrastructure.

**Power cuts back**

A combination of low tariff, high winter power demand and old-fashioned transmission line means that Nepal is once more suffering power cuts. This follows NHA chief Runa Gajung stepping down in September, and the current political crisis which led to the resignation of Energy Minister Bara Khan Pan. After Gajung took over the NHA, he cut down corruption, took up dedicated leads to industries and redistributed electricity to the public.

**Pailla wins ICT Award**

Pailla Emergency Vaccination has been awarded with the Nepal Life Saving Crisis Important ICT Award 2022 for providing life-saving treatment to hospitals to battle Covid-19 crisis.

**QR grocery**

Narsai Gurung with Nepal Radio Bank and Samita Bank has launched digital payment system at the grocery market at a price which any purchase can one be made via scanning QR code on the packet of the produce.
Tales of courage and suffering

Gurkha reputation for bravery is mixed with memories of untold pain and sacrifice

For over two centuries now, Nepal’s real ‘frontline workers’ have been its soldiers who fought and sacrificed their lives in foreign soil for countries other than their own.

The tradition continues, and is upheld by the Gurkha reputation for courage and humility to survive any hardship that is promoted in literature and art.

Until the Malla period, it was unheard of for Nepalis to fight in foreign armies. In fact, it was the other way around: Kathmandu’s kings 300 years ago used to recruit soldiers from Telangana in South India and Afghanistan.

It was only during the Anglo-Nepal war (1814-1816) that Nepalis started fighting beyond the country’s borders. Balchandra Kunwar, who famously thwarted the siege of Nalapani Fort, joined the army of the Sikh maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Even before the Sugauli Treaty ended the war, the British were already recruiting Nepali soldiers for the ‘Nasiri Paltan’ to fight against defending fellow-Nepalis. This went on to become the first ever Gurkha brigade. Then on, ‘Gurkha’ soldiers have been fighting in many wars in different parts of the world to this day.

Gurkha valour has always been interwoven with pain and death. But we do not hear much of that because most Nepali soldiers in those days could not write, and there are few testimonies of what they went through.

It is only recently that censored letters and diaries of Gurkha soldiers at the British Library and Museum give us an indication of their suffering in the battlefield. Because they did not fit the narrative of Gurkha ‘bravery’ and would have affected morale, the letters were censored and never received by their families in Nepal.

These testimonies were a part of the dissertation of Nepali historian Pratyush Ojha, who painstakingly transcribed the letters in the 1990s. They describe the incredible courage, but also the pain, homesickness, and the insufferable wet cold of the trenches during the European winter.

Selected excerpts:

• • •

Names of Gurkha soldiers killed in France among 4,700 soldiers from the British Indian Army commemorated in the Neuve-Chapelle Memorial.

My mother often said, ‘Leave your own country, or you will suffer’. I wish I had listened to that, and more than 100 years later they have inspired me to do further research on the Gurkhas and their never-told tales of suffering,” Chudal says.

There is a possibility that the writings and items belonging to Nepal’s soldiers recovered from Europe’s battlefields will finally be returned to their homeland. With them, we will learn about the other side of the Gurkha saga — the stories of yearning, pain beyond measure, of loves and lives lost.
Nepalis overseas get first vaccinations

Nepalis in Nepal will have to wait till mid-2021 for their Covid-19 inoculations

Upasana Khadka

Long before Nepalis in Nepal will be vaccinated against the coronavirus, Nepali frontline workers around the world are already receiving their first jabs.

The globalisation of the Nepali workforce has become even more apparent during the pandemic: a Nepali doctor in the UK could be using medical gloves made by Nepali workers in a Malaysian glove factory while vaccinating a Nepali nurse.

“Always knew healthcare workers would be in the priority group, but the general understanding was it would still be a few months into 2021 that the vaccines would reach us,” said Binaya Raman Dahal, a hospitalist in North Carolina who got his first injection last week, and said it was like taking any other flu shot.

Dahal recalls how his colleagues would fall ill, and hospital staff had to step in even during off days. “They would fall ill, and hospital staff had to step in even during off days,” he adds.

“We always knew healthcare workers would be in the priority group, but the general understanding was it would still be a few months into 2021 that the vaccines would reach us,” said Binaya Raman Dahal, a hospitalist in North Carolina, getting his vaccination. He says it is a “big relief” for health workers like him as the pandemic rages across the US.

Another Nepali clinician in the United States, Yagya Raj Bhattarai, says the past year has shown that Covid-19 spared no one. “I had a 28-year-old patient who suffered the worst outcomes, including heart failure and acute brain injury. Then, I had a 108-year-old who was positive but completely asymptomatic,” said Bhattarai, who self-isolated in a room throughout the period to keep his family safe.

Across the United States in Nebraska, cardiologist Khagendra Dahal recalls long periods of self-isolation and the difficulty explaining to his young children why he was staying separately. “Even after being vaccinated, we will still need to continue to wear our protective gear because it is not known whether we are transmitters of the virus even if we ourselves are safe,” Dahal says.

Another country with a sizeable Nepali caregiver population is Israel. Her employers got her own shot on New Year’s Day.

Deepika Bhusal also works as a live-in caregiver for an elderly couple in Israel. Her employers got their first doses of the vaccine on 25 December, and there was much celebration in the house.

“I trust the health system here. Even the Prime Minister went on live television to take his first shot publicly,” says Bhusal, who is getting her own shot on New Year’s Day.

The UAE is another popular destination for Nepali workers, and the first country to approve the Chinese Sinopharm vaccine which is said to be 86% effective after trials around the world. The UAE is providing the vaccines free to residents and citizens.

Kisman Magar works in a car showroom whose employer got him and his European and Filipino colleagues vaccinated recently. He says he has been getting lots of congratulatory messages from family in Nepal, while comparitons in the UAE have been querying him about how to enrol for the vaccine.
In a time when everything from medicine to marriage has shifted into a digital medium, there is something almost spiritual about a vinyl record: the weight of the thing, the way it sits in both hands, the ample real estate on the cardboard cover for actual artwork, lyrics, and the occasional essay. The music sounds crisp and crackled, so warm and wholesome that any imperfections or skips only add to the authenticity of the experience. The thing about old records is that they actually smell good: that sweet, lost, analogue smell of dust and time and all of the hands that have held it before.

Vinyl pushes one into hyperbole, and modern collectors of old records tend to be privileged enough to entertain deliberate and impractical passions, to be hopeless connoisseurs of the senses – which, in this age of digital hyper-convenience, can be a beautiful thing.

This is a story about three fellow dreamers, three dedicated friends who have never actually all met in person, three successful entrepreneurs and professionals who, inexplicably, decided to start a vinyl record company targeting a country where you still cannot buy a record player.

In researching this article, I struggled to understand whose idea it was to start a record label in the first place. So I will start with Sushil Koirala, a public health expert who advises international policy makers on pandemics from a small room stacked floor to ceiling with vintage stereo equipment in Bangkok. When not fighting HIV/AIDS across Asia, Sushil was spending his late-night hours on the internet, searching for antique Nepali records. During an ultimately unsuccessful pursuit of a rare Japanese pressing of a Narayan Gopal record, he met Neeraj Gorkhaly Kiran Byanjankar.

Neeraj, in keeping with our story, is a public policy expert who advises the US Government on physics and astronomy. Based in Washington DC, he describes his 15 years with the National Academies of Sciences as a means to an end. And that end is collecting records and philanthropy. He received the aforementioned Narayan Gopal record as a wedding present, and said he will “carry it with me to my grave”.

Kiran Byanjankar rounds out the trio. Kiran’s introduction to vinyl was listening to his Pink Floyd and Deep Purple on an ancient wind-up gramophone at their home in the Chyasal neighbourhood of Patan. He first met Neeraj at a cassette shop in New Road where Neeraj worked, dubbing bootleg mixtapes and manning the counter. By this point, Kiran had found punk and heavy metal, and was in pursuit of Megadeth. After an unsuccessful attempt to fail his interview for a study visa to America, Kiran reluctantly ended up in Chicago. He completed his computer engineering degree and promptly started up a series of successful Nepali restaurants. As his businesses grew, Kiran started collecting vinyl records and taking his employees out to heavy metal concerts as an annual bonus.

And this is how Wild Yak Records started: three friends, spread across the globe, spend countless hours chatting about records on the internet and decide to start a strictly-vinyl Nepali record label. There was never a question about where to begin.

“There is no other singer who is as beloved in Nepal as Narayan Gopal,” says Sushil. Narayan Gopal himself, in many ways helped invent Nepali popular music. His voice, smooth as scotch, silky as the Queen’s sari, was on heavy rotation across Nepal and Darjeeling for nearly four decades, and came to define the fundamentals of Nepali film soundtracks and pop.

There are few Nepalis in popular culture, and even fewer outside of the monarchy or the Maoists, that achieve a level of fame and ubiquity that allows them to shed their last name.

Narayan Gopal Gurucharya, born to a Newa family in the very heart of old Kathmandu,
The story of three successful Nepalis who started a vinyl record company with Narayan Gopal’s golden collection. Find out how they tracked down the original recordings and painstakingly remastered them to keep the old sound intact.
**The Art Market**
The Art Market resumes as we usher into 2021. The former monthly event is a platform for artists to exhibit their creativity, which may come in any form. 2 January, 3pm. Times Concept Store.

**BBQ at Hyatt**
Welcome 2021 with an extensive New Year’s BBQ dinner at Raw Restaurant. For bookings visit their website. 1 January, 6pm. Hyatt Regency Kathmandu.

**New Years’ Bazaar**
Dhokaiya’s organising New years’ bazaar with 15 stalls. Local businesses and brands ranging from TeafaDo to Higher Ground Crafts will be present. 1 January, 2pm. Hotel Drika.

**Paint like Vincent Van Gogh**
In this class, gently guided by some of the techniques that isn’t an artist once used to define their unique styles. By the end, participants would replicate one of their classics. Recommended for beginners and improvers. Register to join. 9 January, 11am.

**BBQ at Hyatt**
Welcome 2021 with an extensive New Year’s BBQ dinner at Raw Restaurant. For bookings visit their website. 1 January, 6pm. Hyatt Regency Kathmandu.

**Hike for Nepal**
Kick start 2021 with a group of professionals and expert guides specialising in cultural heritage tours, a walk, hiking and trekking. This time, along the trail of Bhuddist temple to Leki. Registration required. 2 January, 7am.

**Sagio Samaj**
In its second episode, Sagio Samaj takes on the epidemic of cancer in Nepal. The talk show produced by Himalmedia provides a complete perspective on Nepali society with solution-oriented coverage. New episode: Cancer Katha. 8:30pm. 4 January, Sarasbody TV, Dish Home Channel #130.

**KRIPA JOSHI**
Global warming is causing glaciers to retreat at an alarming rate. As an ice sheet retreats, it releases the energy it has stored to slowly match its contours to the changing land. As glaciers thin, raised glacier ledges rise forming new levels, altered drainage patterns and the closing of many valleys. In this workshop, Kripa Joshi will teach about these 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 shrinking higher up, a trend that will eventually cause massive damage to the downstream. Glaciers are early indicators of climate change and we need to reduce global CO2 emissions. A workshop by Kripa Joshi, a glaciologist.

**Disegliamo con Misso Moti**
The workshop led by Misso Moti helps people to improve their drawing skills. Participants would replicate one of their unique styles. By the end, participants would replicate one of their classics. Recommended for beginners and improvers. Register to join.

**AGE DAY AT ALPINE CENTRE**
Alpine Centre is organizing an age day for people over the age of 55. Those interested can join the two-day workshop at the Centre.

**Wanderlust’s New Year’s resolution**
Wanderlust Journal is suggesting that this year one can resolve to do more Chill out, calm down and connect with nature. It is time to explore the outdoors and reconnect with the natural world.

**FREE NETFLIX DOCUMENTARIES**
Free Netflix documentaries for educational purposes in light of the global coronavirus pandemic. With the award-winning documentary Our Planet from Sir David Attenborough.

**Sustainable Summits 2020**
Listen to Sustainable Summit global leaders deliver powerful messages on the future mountain environment in this 50 minutes online programme. Sustainable summits 2020: A post Covid-19 view from the top. Watch video on YouTube.

**Free Netflix documentaries**
Netflix has released some of its documentaries for free on YouTube for educational purposes in light of the global coronavirus pandemic. With the award-winning documentary Our Planet from Sir David Attenborough.

**Deli Akuj**
Deli Akuj with its fine interiors has you covered when it comes to indulging your taste buds. Choose what fits the mood from their plethora of coffee choices and international delicacies.

**Our Pick**
QII Cement is now open and showing 2020 science fiction horror film. The movie which is directed by雾井壮年由 and based on the novel of the same name by J.G. Ballard. The film follows a scientist who flies his love away from a terrorist and then learns that his love has been transformed into a creature.

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**Invisible Man**
"I can virtually make myself invisible and torment every single person I come across. I am a master of invisibility, and I will use it to my advantage."

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**Handmaid’s Tale**
"I am the Handmaid’s Tale."

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**Seeker**
Seeker tells award-winning stories about the natural forces and innovations that impact the planet, and the universe. Look for their videos on technology and medical advancement. Find Seeker on YouTube and Instagram TV.

**Sustainable Summits 2020**
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**Journeyman Pictures**
Watch groundbreaking factual films about some of the biggest topics from across the globe including on politics, the environment, and the current pandemic. Find Journeyman pictures on YouTube.
The road ahead for Nepal
New film shows how a remote road will change society

Bicram Rijal

A family embarks on a 300 km journey from the remote mountains of northeastern Nepal to Dharan in the plains. There is no road yet to their village, so they trek for five full days before getting a jeep, then a bus to reach the market just to sell a few baskets full of medicinal herbs that they have collected over months.

The journey involves physical hardship, much walking uphill and downhill, through rough and steep terrain (including on a wobbly makeshift log bridge over a fierce river at night) and preparation and planning for how to get a permit for their herbs at a national park office, and past police officers at checkpoints along the way.

The feature-length film *Baato* is a rich visual document that records the villagers’ ambivalent lives and aspirations of ‘development’ as a new motorable road cuts through Nepal’s hinterland. Directed by Lucas Millard and Kate Stryker, the film follows Mikma (pictured, above) and her family and reminds one of *We Corner People* by Kesang Tseten, who also happens to be the executive producer of this film.

*Baato* was screened in the recently concluded Kathmandu International Film Festival (KIMFF).

While *Baato* primarily follows one family on their journey to market from mountains to the plains, it also offers a sneak peek into the politics of roadbuilding in rural Nepal showing us, on the one hand, road as an aspirational object of modernity and, on the other, its building as a contested process.

At the micro level, the villagers anticipate a better life with less walking as jeeps arrive at their doorstep. The process of road building itself involves corruption, bribery, pressures from vested interest groups, during construction. Zooming out to a macro level, we see the road and its construction bring to the fore discourses of development, connectivity, globalisation and international assistance as the government promises the economic upliftment to villagers if the road is completed.

This observational film is an anthropological gaze into people’s lives in the marginal hinterlands that are yet to experience the infrastructure and amenities of modernity: road, electricity, television, and market, among others. The link between road and everyday life is one way of looking at the film, and the politics of infrastructure would be another level of understanding it.

The film captures everyday life in a still-remote corner of Nepal, showing us the sorrows and difficulties hidden underneath the majestic mountains and valleys. Millard and Stryker try to document the uncertain and precarious lives of people in those isolated and far-flung communities. In doing so, they also show us the humility and improvisations with which the family relates to emergent, ambiguous, and adverse situations — a young family member getting sick, or the bus stuck half-way into the journey with engine breakdown.

As the villagers sort out things in these precarious circumstances, we get a glimpse of perseverance and toughness amidst the physical, mental and social challenges they experience. Even after five days of walking carrying heavy loads, the family reminds us that life goes on amidst adversity. They cut jokes and laugh, they smile, and they cherish the little moments of togetherness.

Viewers can watch *Baato* just to glimpse the reality of life, or they can view it as an anthropological study of how connectivity and infrastructure, development and globalisation, citizens and the state, perhaps even politics and geopolitics play a role in Nepal and beyond.

More importantly, the film hints at a larger transformation taking place in Nepal’s Himalayan villages with the advent of roads, and how this is affecting every facet of life for Mikma and families like hers.

Bicram Rijal

is a PhD candidate at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Simon Fraser University, Canada.
Flying home in a pandemic

Tackling tests, paperwork and conflicting emotions while flying across the world to Nepal

2020 began well for me. I had started a new job, got an apartment in Lincoln Park, Chicago and joined a yoga studio. I made plans to come to Nepal in the spring, and I was ready to start a new chapter in life.

Then Covid-19 took over the world.

My yoga studio shut down. My plans to come home was shelved, and I spent many hours staring at the walls of my apartment, while working from home.

Every state and city in the United States came up with its own set of restrictions regarding Covid-19. Chicago went back and forth between closing and re-opening businesses, depending on the number of people who tested positive.

First need to do my research on the new rules and precautions.

When I bought my tickets, only Nepali citizens, expats, and mountaineers were being allowed to fly in. No one else. Everyone had to submit a negative PCR test result, done within the last 72 hours before boarding. I also had to complete the Covid-19 Crisis Management Centre (CMCC) form, in which I had to explain who I was visiting and where I was planning on staying during my visit. The form would have to show a 14-day reservation at the hotel if one did not present a negative PCR test. One would not be allowed to meet their family without a negative PCR test.

I bought a travel insurance for $300 including a $10,000 death coverage. I had to be vaccinated and prepared for it mentally, because I really wanted to see my family. I took every safety measure, because I did not want to risk infecting anyone, including myself. Due to the increase in people testing positive in the US in October, results for tests were taking 24 hours to 7 days. I decided to get tested at three different places to make sure that I would have at least one result before my flight. This meant that I got my test results a day before my flight, on the day of my flight, and the last one a week after my arrival in Kathmandu. I tested negative in all three.

Chicago O’Hare International Airport was quieter than I expected. It took me just 15 minutes to get past security, so I had three hours of wait. Sipping a favorite beverage at the airport lounge, I toyed with countless thoughts that crossed my mind. The next 36 hours of my life was going to be a long stretch.

I was ready with multiple little bottles of hand sanitizers and moisturizers as security provisions for these flights and two layovers. The flight from Chicago to Frankfurt was practically empty. Frankfurt airport was busier than O’Hare. Attendants appeared confused. There were lines at almost every information counter. Also, they did not allow any eating or drinking, but it wasn’t like people were going to listen. Fly, sat, failed attempt to sleep, and repeat.

On my 29-hour long flight (excluding the layovers), I was asked to keep my mask on always, except during brief meal times. I was nervous and excited. Thanks to all the airports and on board, I was able to keep myself distracted with social media and podcasts. I also discovered that since the start of the pandemic, my usage of social media had gone up by over two hours a day.

The flight to Istanbul was empty, too, even though Istanbul airport was busy. It was as if the pandemic had never hit. There were so many people there and all the duty-free shops were filled with people buying Turkish delight, lights and souvenirs. I got myself an evil eye pendant.

The flight to Kathmandu, in contrast, was packed. It looked like the diaspora was all headed home.

Once we landed, the staff from Bir Hospital checked our PCR test reports. At immigration, they collected the CMCC form and revised it with me. They stamped my passport and threw it at me, and I knew I was back in Nepal.

Anjana Rajbhandary lives and works in Chicago. She is starting the fortnightly Nepali Times column ‘Life Time’ about mental and new columnists. Mental health counselor and researcher Anjana Rajbhandary is starting a fortnightly ‘Life Time’ column. Watch her vlog where she talks about anxiety while travelling during the time of Covid.

Many establishments had to shut down permanently and millions lost their jobs.

Most countries around the world were under lockdown. Nepal had also suspended most international flights from March 2020.

Fast forward to September when flights resumed in Nepal, but with the new protocols in place I would day before my flight, on the day of my flight, and the last one a week after my arrival in Kathmandu. I tested negative in all three.

The Chicago O’Hare International Airport was quieter than I remembered. It took me just 15 minutes to get past security, so I had three hours of wait. Sipping a favourite beverage at the airport...
Event organisers are cautiously optimistic as they prepare for rescheduled events of yesteryear

Shristi Karki

As Nepal plunges headfirst into 2021, it is worth reflecting back on a year of cancelled, postponed, or improvised events. Weddings and graduations to cricket tournaments and international conferences, all had to be cancelled or put off.

Visit Nepal 2020 was an early casualty to the pandemic, and the lockdown wrecked the tourism industry. But there is some cautious optimism about numbers picking up in 2021.

There were advantages to cancelled events, virtual exhibitions and festivals meant geography was no longer a barrier.

Organisers are looking forward to holding these cancelled physical events in 2021:

Sustainable Summits

During the 4th Sustainable Summits at Chamo-trek in France, Nepal won the contract to host the 5th edition of the international event in Kathmandu in 2020. It was slated for June and the 5th edition of the international event in the Himalaya.

The Sustainable Summits 2021 will now be held virtually and physically from 31 May to 4 June at ICIMOD headquarters in Kathmandu, just ahead of the Climate Summit COP26 in Glasgow. The Glasgow Summit was itself postponed and is a vital step to heal the planet.

“The situation is getting more urgent with climate change, and the Himalaya is getting more and more focus because we’re seeing the effects of glacial retreat and permafrost cracking underseath bushes in Khumbu,” says Lisa Cheogyal, who is part of the organising committee for the four-day summit.

“COP26 coming up means Sustainable Summits has grown to being something that can make a global statement and achieve last- ing change,” Cheogyal says. “In a way, we’ve taken a step up to be global leaders as opposed to being a voice on the side.”

One of the beneficial side-effects of the global pandemic is that global carbon emissions actually decreased in 2020 despite forest destruction that decreased land sinks for CO2.

Kathmandu Triennale

The Siddhartha Art Foundation’s second Kathmandu Triennale was supposed to be in 2020, and explore multiple discourses on decolonisation, migration, indigenous knowledge. It has been pushed to 27 October 2021, and will feature works from over 100 artists and collaborators from more than 40 countries.

The Triennale will run for a month at multiple venues including the Nepal Art Council, the Bhadurav Shah Baitak. The exhibitions will be curated by Cosmin Costinas of Para Site in Hong Kong, as well as Sheelasha Rajbhandari and Hit Man Gurung.

“The Triennale format has enabled us to link with all the Biennale and Triennale happening around the world in 2021, and place Nepal on the global art map,” says Sangeeta Thapa of the Siddhartha Art Foundation.

Photo Kathmandu

Nepal’s best known photography festival was supposed to happen in November, but will stretch out its 4th edition right through 2021 as opposed to previous month-long events. The shows and talks will mostly be virtual, and some of them have already begun. There will be physical exhibitions in 2021 if the pandemic tapers off.

Film Festivals

Nepal International Film Festival (NEP) barely managed to be held in February just as the pandemic was spreading. The other events such as the Pans Film Festival, the Nepal Human Rights International Film Festival (NHRIFF), and KIFF went virtual during the tail end of 2020, which meant that a large number of viewers including the Nepal diaspora had access to participating Nepali films.

Pokhara Film Society, however, opted to wait out the pandemic and postponed it from March, well before the Covid1 lockdown began. Festival Director Santosh Sharma Sapkota says, “We are hoping to have the 5th edition physically in 2021 with virtual options for viewers who prefer it.”

Tokyo Olympics

Nepali athletes were just gearing up for the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics when it was rescheduled for 23 July-8 August 2021. Fifteen Nepali athletes are training for archery, judo, taekwondo, karate, shooting, weightlifting, swimming, and athletics. Of them, ten are in Kathmandu and three are in Pokhara, while two swimmers have been training in London.

Chaturananda Raj Vaidhya of the Nepal Olympics Committee (NOC) told Nepal Times the committee has constantly been in touch with the athletes virtually to ensure that their training and nutrition needs were being met. Although training was scaled-back during the lockdown, athletes are now back to full-fledged schedules.

“The International Olympic Committee has informed us that all participating Olympi- ans will be vaccinated for free in the event that any coronavirus vaccine is approved,” Vaidhya explains. “In the meantime, we are following all safety protocols.”

Ring in the old in 2021

1/1/2021

It’s New Year’s Bazaar

With our Partners
It could be that the obituaries for printed newspapers and magazines were somewhat premature.

Alisha Sijapatı

The death of print is exaggerated.

The Year of Covid hit economies hard, and more so than the media business which depends mainly on advertising. With sales down and many businesses going belly-up, the media’s main source of revenue dried up as well.

When the lockdown went into effect on 24 March, most legacy businesses going belly-up, the media was hardest hit. Most of the gardening publications like Nagarik, Kantipur, Kathmandu Post and The Himalayan Times also halted hardcopies, and terminated their other magazines.

Among the broadsheets, only Naya Patrika and Annapurna Post continued to print much longer versions of their pages, mainly surviving on government notices. However, within ten days Nepal’s largest-circulation newspaper Kantipur resumed printing after it found out that it was losing market share. “We panicked prematurely, and paused print production was a near-fatal decision,” admits Mahesh Kafle, Kantipur Media Group. “We did lose some confidence in our readers, but we have won most of it back. Resuming print was the best decision we made.”

Although it was a question of visibility in the market and a presence in the corridors of power in Singha Darbar, media as a business has struggled to survive in the past ten months as Nepal’s economy flattened during the March-July lockdown. The prognosis for 2021 is looking only slightly better.

A hand full of digital-only portals with lower overheads rode out the crisis, but even they had to cut costs as new sites diluted online readership. Print media found it difficult to get existing companies to switch advertising to their online editions. While page views of their digital editions hit the roof, revenue crashed.

Back in April, Shiva Gaunle of Sharecast Initiative showed that only 7% of a nationwide sample regularly read print media, while the proportion of people who get their information from online media had grown, but only to 16% by October.

It has been a challenging year for publishers, but they should keep in mind that the readership has not decreased. It’s just that the news sources have shifted to the digital platform, says Madhus Acharya of Sharecast. He adds that the real reason there are not more readers of print is because publishers have not invested in efficient nationwide distribution. “Most respondents in our survey said they would read newspapers if they could buy them easily.”

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Sonia Awale

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mall at Maya Handicrafts Jewellery in Thamel, are busy these days managing delivery for handmade silver jewellery ordered by customers in Kathmandu, Butwal, Pokhara, Bhairahawa, as well as from outside Nepal.

The store has seen its online sales peak despite the pandemic, making for up to 70% of total transactions. Encouraged by their success, the owners opened Nakkali, to sell gold-plated jewellery. Up to 90% sales are currently conducted through digital platforms.

“Nepalis now have an easy access to online shopping because of increased Internet connectivity. This, coupled with better online service has translated into healthy digital sales. The pandemic has only accelerated the growth,” says Samir Shakya of Maya Handicrafts.

Following the Covid-19 lockdown, Glambisque, an up-and-coming Nepali cosmetics brand, shut down its stores in Lazimpat and Lalbit Mall. Since then, the two-year-old company has been operating only online. The sales have been more or less the same, but 100% driven by digital transactions.

“At this rate we won’t even need to have physical stores anymore when things get back to normal,” says Shalini Rana of Glambisque.

“People weren’t comfortable with online shopping in the past. Lockdowns and safety protocols however forced them to try it out.”

Small and medium businesses like Maya Handicrafts Jewellery and Glambisque use social media sites like Instagram and Facebook, to market their products. Increasingly, more companies are also using e-commerce platforms like Daraz and Sastodeal to advertise their goods.

Payments are usually made via e-wallets (e-Sewa, Khalti, IME pay) or by cash on delivery. Goods are either home delivered or couriered if clients are outside Kathmandu.

“Nepal was already transitioning to e-commerce and digital market, but the pandemic sped up the process and provided much-needed boost,” explains digital marketer, Santia Shah.

“Even so, businesses with hybrid presence are ahead of the others.”

Many people turned to organic produce and super foods during the pandemic, with the hope of building immunity against coronavirus. The inclination towards a healthy diet and fitness caused online grocery and health stores to thrive.

The increasing need to stay ‘online’ has also had an impact on businesses selling electronic items. People have been upgrading their smartphones and computers for webinars and online classes, which increased business for gadgets and repair shops.

Hamroazaar online classified has seen 40% increase in overall traffic since the pandemic. Categories like computers and laptops and two wheelers — because public transport is now considered unsafe — have seen most enquiries in this Nepali version of eBay.

Covid-19 seems to have made people health conscious as well as tech savvy.

Eblock Neupane of Juas Health Food Store says, “Before the pandemic, people interested in our products used to ask for our physical stores. Now they call us up for home delivery of ayurvedic items like shilajit, and Keto diet ingredients.”

Capitalising on the growing online market, former Miss Nepal Anushka Shrestha also recently launched Makkusé, an online dessert store that specialises in Nepal’s authentic and traditional sweets (such as Gundpak and Puskari) with modern touch.

Not all businesses have found the trend towards online shopping as encouraging. Despite demand and overwhelming projections, Mastic Korean cosmetics in Lalbit Mall has not been able to stock up because they haven’t been able to import goods due to lockdowns and restrictions. The recently launched online handicraft store, Durbar Square, is also still waiting for sales to pick up.

Even so, Suresh Shrestha of Ratna Books says the shift towards online shopping has other benefits besides a growth in sales. “It has also allowed us to understand the taste of our consumers. This is an invaluable information for better future planning,” he says.

Nepal’s proposed Electronic Commerce Bill is expected to standardise online transitions while protecting user data and privacy. It also has provisions for easy return, exchange and refunds, and traders found violating the rules will be fined up to Rs300,000.

Despite the entry into Nepal’s online retail market of China’s Alibabas through Daraz and India’s Flipkart via Sastodeal, e-commerce is still at a nascent stage. But one of the side effects of Covid-19 is that it is set to grow in the next few years as more people find online shopping safe, convenient and time efficient.

“This boom in online shopping is driven by pandemic-induced need. It might be challenging to sustain it, but if we improve consumers’ online shopping experience,” says Manish Alhikari of Foodmandu.

Nepal’s fledging e-commerce finds its footing during the pandemic

Actress Shilpa Maitreyi in Maya Handicrafts Jewellery’s Khartma malai necklace and Former Miss Nepal Shrinkhala Khatiwada promoting her own line of Glambisque palettes.

Nepal goes online shopping in 2020

E-commerce

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Anus horibilis

Statutory Government Health Warning:
The following segment contains material that some readers may find disturbing. Viewer discretion is advised. Management is not responsible for untoward consequences.

All right. If you insist on reading this despite that warning, The Ass can’t stop you. It’s still a free country.

I have heard through the grapevine that many of you cannot wait for this year to be over, and for things to return to a normalitarian state. Well, guess what folks, sorry to break this to you as you crack open a bottle of bubbly at midnight, but 2021 is going to be even crappier than 2020.

In fact, is it such a good idea to embark on a brand new year at this juncture in time? Do we actually want to go through another 365 days of this? At least during the year gone by, we were getting used to being miserable. In the new year we will have to get used to being miserable all over again. Can’t we just postpone 2021?

Instead of looking ahead at an unpredictable new year, therefore, let us recall fondly the certitudes of 2020 and count our many blessings in an anus horibilis:

1. As the rest of the world struggles with the second and third wave, here in Nepal we have already attained herd impunity. None of our past, present and future rulers will ever have to answer for their misdemeanours.
2. Nepal’s Olitics (the ‘P’ is silent) did not throw up any nasty surprises in 2020. It was all very predictable. In a nutshell, Nepal’s Communists could not get along and split the party, ensuring stability and prosperity for us all.
3. The government thankfully spared us the shock of seeing the Godavari Road widened and paved in 2020. Imagine what an upsetting jolt that would have been.
4. Thank god Melamchi was not completed by Dasain as promised. How would we as a nation ever get over a bombshell like that?
5. What a shock it was to see that Kathmandu Airport was actually upgraded during the pandemic. But thanks to the serpentine queues and smellly loo, we can thankfully still feel perfectly at home there.
7. And for those who are nostalgic for the Dark Ages, the thoughtful folks at Nepal Electricity Authoritarians (NEA) brought back power cuts.
8. I know, there are many defeatist Nepalis who always see the glass as half-empty no matter what. This is no time for pessimism, the glass is actually completely empty. We should all head out for a refill.
9. We should warn our giant neighbours to the North and South not to bother trying to destabilise Nepal in 2021. We are already doing that to ourselves.
10. Forget the coronavirus vaccine, what we need more urgently is a vaccine against corruption to inoculate the entire Oligarchy.

The bottom line, FYI, is that the only way to survive 2021 is WTF to LMFAO. G2G. TTYL.