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Contact Details:
Telephone: 01-5550351
Cell-9804236333, 9851176993
e-Mail: lalitpur.mri3tesla@gmail.com
website: www.lalitpur3tmri.com
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Alisha Sijapati



EXCLUSIVELY ON

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Pandemic of poverty

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

This newspaper has been tracking the outcomes of these surveys that were conducted in May, July, August and October. It is a sobering reminder that while the national leadership is engrossed in a fight to the finish in Kathmandu, the state has left Nepalis (especially the most vulnerable) to fend for



UNICEF NEPAL

themselves in dealing with the health and economic impact of the Covid-19 crisis.

The surveys were conducted by Sharecast Initiative for Unicef and the last one in October involved a representative sample of 6,558 households with children all over the country.

The most striking finding was that 42% of households in Nepal have no earnings at all, and a further 19% 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 level 15 years ago at the end of the conflict.

The Unicef survey shows that the incidence of household poverty during the Covid-19 crisis is spread unevenly throughout Nepal. For instance, the majority of those who remain in the 'no earning' category this year are from rural parts of Sudurpaschim and Lumbini Provinces. A quarter of them tend to be female-led households and 10% were Dalit families.

The survey shows a clear correlation between the pandemic-induced loss of income across Nepal. For example, the survey in May had shown that there were zero households

Nepal's children bear the brunt of falling household income during the Covid-19 crisis

with no earnings, or those making less than Rs10,000 a month. Strikingly, this figure went up to 49% in July, and even climbed to a high of 64% in August.

By October it had fallen to 42%+19% with income below Rs10,000 a month, and it is likely even lower for December. However, 45% of households were still reporting loss of income, and even those with jobs were earning less.

The data shows that except for Karnali, all six other provinces reported a decrease in job loss from May to October, 2020. Province 2 showed a consistently high level of those who had lost livelihoods, and there was little improvement from August to October. Bagmati and Lumbini Provinces had the lowest percentage of respondents reporting job losses since August.

The coping mechanism for most of those slipping into poverty was to borrow, dig into savings, cut household expenditure, migrate, or rely on remittances. Disaggregated data showed that 61% of Dalit families were forced to borrow to survive, while only 48% of non-Dalit families had to borrow money to run the household, revealing that caste differences can also mean a class gap.

Increased indebtedness will lead many households to fall deeper into poverty. Female-led households tend to borrow less, depend more on savings and remittances, the findings show.

Nepal's children bore the brunt of falling household incomes 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 30%, while children's education rose from 35% to 45%.

One in five families still say they have to struggle to feed their children. This proportion 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, 22% were online. However, in Sudurpaschim and Province 2, a quarter of families said their children were not attending school at all.

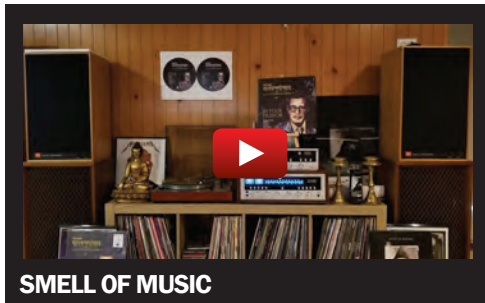
Survey results tend to be dry and impersonal. But behind each of these numbing numbers are untold stories of families and children abandoned by an uncaring state. Is it too much to hope that in 2021, Nepal's rulers will take steps to reverse this neglect?

ONLINE PACKAGES



PRO PRINT

Nepali Times is resuming its weekly hardcover edition with the world-class design and content that it has been always known for from this issue. On the occasion, we spoke with avid readers of the paper, and asked them what they missed about the printed edition in the past 10 months. Story: [pages 1 and 14](#).



SMELL OF MUSIC

The story of three successful Nepalis (public health expert, US government advisor and computer engineer) 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. Story: [pages 8-9](#).



LIFE TIME

With the New Year, we are introducing new columns and new columnists. Mental health counselor and researcher Anjana Rajbhandary is starting a fortnightly column 'Life Time'. Watch her vlog where she talks about anxiety while travelling during the time of Covid. Her column: [page 12](#).

CAUGHT RED-HANDED

One of many I am sure who take the money from people trying to make a better life for themselves ('Labour recruiter netted,' Upasana Khadka, #1041). So bad as we say "Throw the book at them" (Charge and jail them for everything possible).

Roger Ray

• Great work, Department of Foreign Employment, we hope to see more such operations taking place. Respect to those two Nepali workers who had courage to report.

Karong Sapna

SANTOSH SHAH

Chef Santosh Shah was one of the best contestants ever. He was fun, kind, interesting, self deprecating and an amazing cook ('Santosh Shah was born in Nepal', Alisha Sijapati, [nepalitimes.com](#)). His stories about Nepal were full of love and charm, he should be Nepal's new Ambassador because he definitely sold Nepal to me. And I loved his cap!

Nicky Simpson

• Santosh never said he was cooking a Nepali dish, he always said that it was 'inspired by' Nepal. He used ingredients many people had never tried before, elevating the dishes into fine dining. I think he did a very genuine and terrific job flying the flag for Nepal, a country that many of the viewers in the UK probably knew very little about.

Marianne Heredge

COVID AND CROWD

Only 10 days ago a fairly young acquaintance of mine passed away because of Covid-19 ('Concerts, rallies and crowded malls', Bikram Rai, [nepalitimes.com](#)). Concerts, bars and movies are just not for me, coronavirus is still around.

Bal K Joshi

• The real tragedy is not that people are putting themselves at risk but the more vulnerable ones they get in contact with. I am ashamed that youth are putting petty things like party and entertainment on priority and completely missing the big picture.

Bsh Shrestha

• The improvement in the recovery rate is enticing crowds. Nothing can be done when you have a self-motivated herd like these to tame.

Ad Rai

• Doesn't surprise me, even my own Nepali family in Pokhara are acting as if nothing is wrong. Hordes of them together, no masks, no social distancing in recent social media posts that I came across.

Cathy Grogan

Times.com

WHAT'S TRENDING



Labour recruiter netted in sting raid

by Upasana Khadka

A recruiting agency Manaslu International that was charging illegal fees from migrant workers has been caught red-handed in an undercover operation. Read the story behind the sting operation at [nepalitimes.com](#) and watch video of DOFE officers nab the culprits.

[f](#) Most reached and shared on Facebook



Step back from the brink

Editorial

Prime Minister KP Oli's brinkmanship has led the country to the edge of the cliff once again with poor governance and illegally dissolving the House. When the dust settles, let's plan for a free, fair and peaceful elections in 2021. Follow us on social media for the latest political updates.

[t](#) Most popular on Twitter

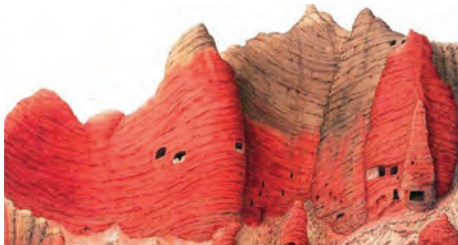


'Santosh Shah was born in Nepal'

by Alisha Sijapati

Despite his achievements, *MasterChef Professionals 2020* finalist Santosh Shah got entangled in the fault lines in Nepal about ethnic identity, exclusion and the debate about the symbols of a unitary state for wearing a Nepali cap. Join in the online discussion.

[“ ”](#) Most commented



Robert G Powell, 1948-2020

by Linda Kentro and James Giambrone

A tribute to Robert Gordon Powell, a visionary artist who shared his unique perceptions of Asian architecture, art and culture with his meticulous drawings of Nepal's landscapes passed away this month, on our website.

[r](#) Most visited online page

QUOTE TWEETS



Nepali Times@NepaliTimes
As 2020 comes to a close, people in #Kathmandu are behaving as if the #pandemic is over.
Photos by @BikramRai0



Sujeev Shakyaa@sujeevshakyaa
A country that can blame politicians for all the problems have no necessity of civic sense.



Nepali Times@NepaliTimes
What has been done to the Constitution has been done. When the dust settles, let's plan for a free, fair and peaceful elections in 2021.



Ratna Sansar Shrestha@rsansar
How can "free, fair" election be expected from the current incumbent that acted in contravention of the Constitution; especially when the Election Commission has been packed with their lackeys?



Sujala Pant@SujalaPant
That's our problem. We keep accepting these borderline illegal/unconstitutional moves over and over again and hope things will get better. And they don't. Our ke game attitude needs to change



Purushottam Mudbhary@MudbharyPuru
The dissolution of Parliament is unconstitutional and was forced by Oli who is clearly in the minority both in Parliament and his party. He is a coward who fled his constitutional duty to face the vote of no confidence. The election is unnecessary, untimely and costly.



Nepali Times@NepaliTimes
A #Nepali recruitment agency taking illegal fees from #migrant workers has been caught red-handed in an undercover operation.



Krishna Joshi@krishna_joshi01
Good stuff. Hope this is given continuity and the guilty are not able to bribe their way off the hook.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

'Hrithik Roshan' riots

What a start to 2001 it was twenty years ago. After a horrid year in which there was the Maoist attack on Dunai, strikes that shut down the country and the hijacking of a Kathmandu-Delhi flight, anti-India riots that started in Chitwan spread to Kathmandu after Bollywood star Hrithik Roshan purportedly said he hated Nepal and its people.

No one knows whether the actor actually said those words. Long before fake news, trolls and hate speech on social media, the rumours spread like wildfire fanned possibly by the far right and far left elements out to create chaos.

There was arson, looting, attacks on Nepalis from the plains. Five people were killed, a curfew was imposed 26-27 December. The violence showed how volatile Nepal had become, all it took was a spark to set the country ablaze. But little did we know that 2001 had more tragedies and disasters in store for Nepal.

Excerpt from the Editorial titled 'Autopsy' in *Nepali Times* #24 from 5-11 January 2001:

An Indian actor doesn't say something and five people are dead. What would have happened if he had actually said what he is supposed to have said? What does it say about the state of our polity, the psychological state of this country that a harmless rumour which should have been laughed off as a joke, turns deadly serious and picks up a communal flavour? As someone said: "All you need is



an 'ass' to turn laughter into slaughter." How fragile is our national pride, how volatile has our society become, that something like this can light the fuse of conflagration.

Unknown to most of us, we seem to have imported the insecurity and paranoia that we used to observe south of the border. How rumours of Ayodhya set off carnage across India, how Indira Gandhi's assassination triggered a pogrom against Sikhs in Delhi. Last week's violence was also an indication of what happens when you mix prejudice with politics. There is latent bigotry and an undercurrent of racism and intolerance in every society, but it is not until some cold-blooded and calculating politician comes along that society's hidden vice manifests itself as

overt violence.

The environment was tinder dry, waiting for a spark. And as the flames spread, there was no shortage of those who wanted to cash in: the Congress factions, the nine leftists, the ultra-right, the Maoists, communal chauvinists. It was never about Hrithik Roshan, it was not even about India-Nepal relations, and it threatened to degenerate as we had warned last week into a hill-plains rupture within Nepal. Who were the architects of the anarchy? Just ask: who had a motive, who benefited? Those who want to roll back parliamentary democracy. And who were the losers? The Nepali people.

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



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



A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER 

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 Bibek 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 covering 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.



Bhawana Gurung interviews a resident of Matatirtha in Kathmandu.



Journalists at Bhutan Broadcasting Service taking a break.



Ruth Cabal in CNN's Manila studio.

Bhutanese journalist Jigme Thinley was running up and down the stairs of his condo as the gym was closed. He was working for the *Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development* in Malaysia when the pandemic hit, and decided it was time to head home.

He arrived home in Thimphu in September, as Bhutan relaxed the lockdown temporarily. But as a new national lockdown came into effect in Bhutan on 23 December in response to a second wave, Thinley and his colleagues found that they could no longer go home after work.

"We stay at the office these days. We all brought our own bedding. We've turned our offices into working rooms-cum-bedrooms," says Thinley, now General Manager of News and Current Affairs at *Bhutan Broadcasting Service*.

Logistic adjustments have been a universal experience for journalists elsewhere in Asia in 2020. Ruth Cabal works for *CNN* in Manila and had to manage from a temporary studio at home in the initial days of reporting Covid-19.

"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 coffees 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 properly vet 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 Bibek Bhandari, the Nepali journalist in Shanghai.

Even with all the challenges, those doing crisis coverage have tried to find comfort in their vocation.

"We did a lot of learning and creating together with colleagues, who went on to become good friends by the end of lockdown," says podcaster Bhawana Gurung. "It's been a year of tracing common grounds to heal — for our audience as well as for ourselves." 🇳🇵



"As soon as we heard about Covid-19, we felt there was a gap in lifesaving information. We thought a podcast would be an effective medium," says Gurung who runs *Sankatma Sathi* with Thapa, about safety during the pandemic.

"We recorded our first episode in bed, on the phone," laughs Thapa, who spent the first five months of the lockdown at her home in Matatirtha, producing stories from her neighbourhood. The podcast, targeted at a rural Nepali audience, was soon hooked up by 20 community radio stations.

But working from home comes with its own challenges. "In the beginning it was fun because I could work from bed, but eventually, you're always staring at your four walls, especially if you live alone," says Gurung.

In India, however, the opposite was true for Hashim (who goes by his first name), a journalist with *Data Leads* in New Delhi. He says, "Everyone is not privileged. If you're living in a one-BHK (one bedroom, hall and kitchen) apartment in Noida with six family members, it can be challenging."

Hashim was also filming tutorials for journalists on reporting from home, which required him to turn his home into a makeshift studio. "You're constantly asking everyone to quiet down during recordings and online meetings. It can take a toll on your family," he says. "And if you're freelancing, it is hard to sell a story without the Covid angle."

In India, 44 journalists died due to the virus, which made Hashim himself aware of his own mortality. He has not left his Delhi neighbourhood for six months as he continues to mine data for journalistic videos from home, while skipping to stay fit. "I'm exercising for the first time in my life," he says on WhatsApp.

Locked away in his apartment in Kuala Lumpur for four months,

Youth activists lead climate movement from the mountains to the plains of Nepal

● Tulsi Rauniyar

Mingma Nuru Sherpa left the village he was born in the region below Mt Everest at age 18 to study environment science in Kathmandu. When he goes home for his holidays he has seen the mountains change from year to year.

He is specialising in climate science at a college in Boudha and is determined to help his people adapt to the shrinking glaciers and receding snowlines of the Khumbu.

“From the house I grew up in, I could see the snowlines of the Phari Lapcha peak receding year by year. It was heartbreaking to see the change,” says Sherpa. “The mountains are impacted by climate change and our livelihoods depend on tourism. Without the mountains, we are nothing.”

A study by the Kathmandu-based International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) last year showed that the Himalayan mountains are melting faster than forecast, and more rapidly than the global average. At this rate, one-third of the ice and snow will be gone during this century, with catastrophic impact on the people of the Himalaya and millions living downstream.

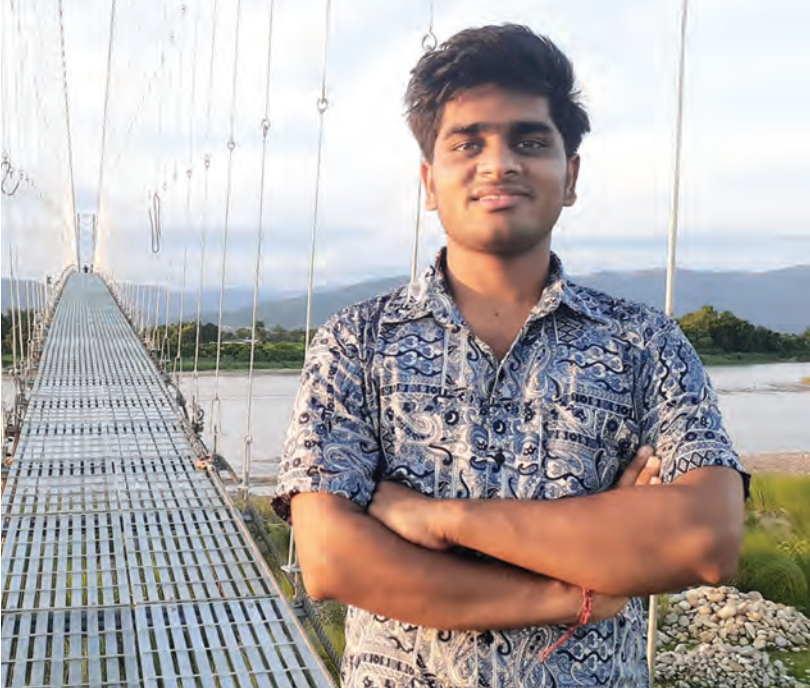
Sherpa is one of the 400 members of a youth-led activist group called Nepalese Youth for Climate Action (NYCA), a network established just for youth engagement to plan adaptation, activism and awareness about the climate crisis. The platform is a training ground for climate activism, to organise issues-centred campaigns and engage in conversations with experts on climate science and policy.



Mingma Nuru Sherpa has watched changes in the mountains from year to year.



Shreya KC at the Climate Summit in Madrid last year.



Gaurav Thakur's focus is on climate-resilient farming in the 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 policies.

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 contributes less than 0.3 tons annually per capita of carbon, compared to 37 tons for every Qatari. Yet, Nepal is in the list of top countries to suffer gravest consequences of the climate crisis.

“Climate change has not yet been a priority for Nepal’s leaders, awareness is limited and there is even less action. Old and young, everyone should know what is happening and should also feel responsible,” says KC.

Nepal is party to the United Nations Framework on Convention of 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 and more

young Nepalis are getting involved. While Mingma Nuru Sherpa is from the high mountains, Shreya KC is from Kathmandu, Gaurav Thakur, also 22, is from Janakpur in the Tarai – making it a

truly हिमाल / पहाड / तराई 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 south polar regions, the international community is finally also 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 – not just to help protect the planet but to also save its own economy.

Nepal’s youth climate activists 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, a wave of powerful young people positioning themselves as leaders, are demanding stronger action. A ray of hope is the promise that the United States will rejoin 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.” 🇳🇵

Khukri

prabhu BANK

Nepal economy 2021

After a year of stagnation due to the Covid-19 crisis, Nepal's economy had just started getting back on track and the macro-economic numbers were picking up, when new political uncertainty once more threatens to derail it. If snap elections go ahead in April-May next year it will eat 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 improved, the trade deficit has narrowed and remittances from Nepali workers

Power cuts back

A combination of low river flow, high winter power demand and old-fashioned mismanagement have meant that Nepalis are once more suffering power cuts. This follows NEA chief Kulman Ghising stepping down in September, and the current political crisis which led to the resignation of Energy Minister Barsha Man Pun. After Ghising took over the NEA, he curbed corruption, cut off dedicated feeds to industries and

Turkish sports tie-up

Turkish Airlines for the second consecutive

Paaila wins ICT Award

Paaila Emergency Resuscitator has been awarded with 'Ncell Innovation Driven Crisis Response ICT Award 2020' for providing life saving ventilators to the hospitals to battle Covid-19 crisis.

QR grocery

Naxal Tarkari Bazar with Nepal Rastra Bank and Sanima Bank has launched digital payment system at the grocery market as per which any purchase can now be made via scanning QR code on the packet of the produce.

year is the airlines partner for the Nepal Sports Journalist Forum's Pulsar Sports Award. Both male and female category winners will receive one round trip air ticket each to a European destination of their choice.

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Tales of courage and suffering

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



IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

Nepali soldiers and porters assemble at Tundikhel in 1915 before marching down to India to join the Allied forces in Europe, Turkey and West Asia. Of the 200,000 Nepalis conscripted, about 20,000 were killed.



NEUVE-CHAPPELLE MEMORIAL

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

day on 30 October 1914 in La Bassée.

Many of the 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 Pratyoush Onta, 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:

Worry about me. This war is fierce. Five of my friends from the Fourth Double Company have been killed. From the Second Company, one-third of the soldiers have lost their lives. The Gurkha Regiment has suffered a huge loss. And for those of us who are still alive, the chances of survival look slim.

On 19 May 1914 at five in the morning, our Fourth Double Company was attacked. We were 400 feet away from the German trench. We loaded our rifles with bullets, and stuck khukris in our mouths and went over the top. Of all the wars that I have ever fought in, this is the most ferocious. Many from my company were killed, but

we were able to capture the German trench. Because I was shot in my right elbow, I couldn't move ahead with my company. By god's grace the bullet didn't pierce my bones. I am now in London and recovering. I will soon return to France and fight a good war with those Germans and kill them, because they aren't human. They use poison gas to win a war.

You have been asking me about this place. This is like the fire and the frying pan. When I return home, we can talk about this. I will give you all the details, but I cannot promise you if that day will ever come.

I could have written about the conditions here, but we are not allowed to share details. Many



of our letters are opened and are censored. If we write anything against the orders given, the one who has written the letter will be punished severely. Dear brother, you must be going through a difficult time in your battlefield, but I understand. We are also suffering the same anguish. Brother, it rains a lot here and it is muddy. It is extremely cold, too.

I took part in an attack on a German trench in August. I was injured and had little sense of what was happening. I was taken prisoner by the Germans and sent off to their country. They cut my leg in the prisoners' camp. I was then hospitalised for two months in Germany and later sent to Britain. They have now received orders to send me to India.

This is your brother Bahadur Pun, sending you my greetings. If you have three or four rupees, please send it to me. Along with that, if possible, please send some food, something to drink and some clothes. Dhaniram Pun and I are now prisoners of war in Germany.

My mother often said, 'Leave your job, son, and come back home. Work in your own country, or you will suffer'. I wish I had listened to her. Now when I think of it, my heart fills with regret.

When the Germans realised that

the British POWs spoke so many languages, they took this as an opportunity for linguistic research. They recorded the experiences of the Gurkha prisoners through their songs and folklore.

Nepali researcher Alka Atreya Chudal at Vienna University has been given access to some of this material that includes early sound recordings of the Gurkha prisoners in Germany. Going through the archives at Berlin's Humboldt Museum, Chudal found songs by Gurkha POW Jas Bahadur Rai that were recorded in 1915.

Rai died seven months later, and his grave stone in a cemetery outside Berlin (pictured left, below) preserves the date: 3 January 1917. Although this was a model prison that the Germans used to show international inspectors, many Nepali prisoners succumbed to tuberculosis in winter.

"Jas Bahadur missed home, his songs and writings are a testimony 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. 🇳🇵

Based on the first episode of Saglo Samaj, a tv magazine program produced by Himalmedia which is broadcast every Monday, at 8:30 pm on Dish Home Channel 130.



Watch the first episode of *Saglo Samaj: Sipahiko Pida* on YouTube. The pilot explores the Gurkha legend that has always been interwoven with pain and death, and not just their bravery that they are known for.

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 became 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.

"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 (pictured above, right), a Nepali 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. The first couple of months into the pandemic, personal protective equipment ran out, and there was a rush of patients following the July 4 and Labour Day weekends.



Nischal Shrestha, a caregiver in Israel, getting vaccinated last week. She has been in Israel for 11 years, and looking after a senior citizen who was also vaccinated.



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.

"There is a big sense of relief that the vaccines are here," Dahal said over the phone, adding that he will still have to be careful because of the risk to family.

Srijana Panta Rokka (pictured, right) has been a nurse in the UK since 2004, and considers herself fortunate for being one of the first recipients of the vaccine. "It was like taking a flu-shot. Others report sore arms, temperature and headache as side effects, but for me I just felt tired and my eyes ached that day," she recalls.

Her general practice has largely avoided in-contact patients since March, and has moved to tele-medicine, while only taking emergency in-person patients. But from 1 January, she will be serving as a vaccinator, after being trained in administering the Pfizer vaccine.

"I was one of the nine nurses in



Srijana Panta Rokka has been a nurse in the UK for 15 years, and says she is fortunate as a frontline worker to be one of the first in the UK to be vaccinated against Covid-19.

my practice who got vaccinated so we could vaccinate others," Rokka said in a phone interview. Most patients eligible for vaccination will be above 80 years.

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 20-year-old patient who suffered the worst outcomes, including heart failure and anoxic brain injury. Then, I had a 100-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, and it has started a massive vaccine

campaign for health workers, those over 60 and at high risk. Nepali caregivers are considered frontline workers.

Nischal Shrestha (pictured, far left) has been living in Israel for the last 11 years, and takes care of a 91-year-old woman who she took to the hospital to vaccinate last week.

"I was not expecting the shot because we were told that the priority would be health workers and the elderly. But my employer got the hospital to also get me immunised," says Shrestha, who says her arm and body ached for a day or two, but she is fine now.

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.

Kisan 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 compatriots in the UAE have been querying him about how to enrol for the vaccine. 🇳🇵

कोरोनाबाट सुरक्षित रहने तीन उपायहरू



कोरोनाबाट आफू पनि बचाउँ र अरुलाई पनि बचाऔं

युनिसेफसँगको सहकार्यमा,
नेपाल सरकार, स्वास्थ्य तथा जनसंख्या मन्त्रालय
र
एनसेलद्वारा जनहितमा जारी

Ncell

unicef



नेपाल सरकार
स्वास्थ्य तथा जनसंख्या मन्त्रालय

The sweet sm



Wild Yak Records brings back crisp and crackly Narayan Gopal in vinyl

● Ben Ayers

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.

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 *दुलो दाइ* play 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



Neeraj Gorkhaly



Kiran Byanjankar

Nepal as Narayan Gopal,” says Sushil. Narayan Gopal – the *स्वर सम्राट* 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,



Smell of music

was one. His art was also inseparable from his legend, which invited plentiful speculation and rumour: the prodigious drinking and smoking, the whispered affections for (and from)

Queen Aishwarya, partnerships with poets and writers that all somehow crumbled – and cumulating in an early death in 1990 from his excesses at 51.

It was as if this life could not keep him



Sushil Koirala

elusive as the yeti.)

These records all made their way back to Nepal and were played on the radio or listened to on the scratchy gramophones that now gather dust in the attics, or hold cocktail glasses in the well-appointed living rooms of Kathmandu's gentry. This lasted for about two decades, until it was thoroughly and permanently made irrelevant with the introduction of affordable cassette tapes in the mid 1980s.

Narayan Gopal would have been 81 this year. Nobody really knows how many recordings of his songs actually exist. His legend, now amplified on the internet, claims something in the neighbourhood of 500, but all estimates point to something closer to 130-150 recordings.

As Ratna Recording shut down, the original tapes were moved to Nepal Television. After that, it's murky. But thankfully, Music Nepal has carefully saved copies of the analogue recordings of many of the original recordings from that era.

In 2018, Sushil tracked down the original recordings at Music Nepal and had them copied directly onto vintage reel-to-reel tapes, imported from France. It was clear to everyone at Wild Yak that this would be a completely analogue process from start to finish. The master copies were then sent to Ohio where they were painstakingly remastered.

"We made every attempt to keep the old sound intact," recalls Sushil. "In some cases this even meant sacrificing cleanliness or quality, but we wanted the records to sound like

they originally did." Before long, 300 copies of *Swor Samrat Narayan Gopal – Golden Collection* were pressed into metallic gold vinyl records, and began their slow journey to eager collectors across the Planet.

Was the effort worth it? It seems so. Kiran told me: "The record left me spellbound." Sushil adds: "When I first listened to it I could make out Narayan Gopal's Newa accent."

Kashish Das Shrestha, a former radio DJ and editor of *Wave* magazine spent a few of his own more productive years searching fruitlessly for Narayan Gopal's original recordings. He was thrilled to receive his copy of the new record: "It's phenomenal. Something I've wanted for over a decade."

Of the 300 records, only 50 remain available for purchase. With these strong, albeit modest, sales of the Narayan Gopal collection, I couldn't help but ask again: *Was all this effort worth it?*

"This was never started to be a profitable business," Neeraj replied. "We roll all of our income into paying for the next project."

With this in mind, Wild Yak has nearly completed its next album. With the hope of tapping into a younger generation of enthusiasts, a Hanuman-esque bright orange pressing of Bipul Chhetri's *Sketches of Darjeeling* will be ready for distribution in January.

"Bipul is like the new Narayan Gopal. Everyone loves him," says Kiran.

After this, the label has plans for compilations of Kumar Basnet, Aruna Lama and a selection of popular Nepali rock and roll from the 70's and 80's – bringing back bands like The Influence, Cross Roads, and 1974 AD.

But first, they need to locate the original tapes.

When I first received my own copy of *Swor Samrat* in September, I had just returned to the United States. Awash in the Covid sterility of America, I was quickly nostalgic for Kathmandu. As I pulled the record out of the dust jacket, I was struck by the gold color, shining like a storefront on New Road during the week before Dasain.

I put the record carefully on the turntable and set the needle. Out of my speakers crept a flute and loping bass, lightly dusted with reverb. A few seconds in, The Emperor's voice emerged crisp and rich, sweet as जैरो and चिया. I was transported.

मेरो गीत भन्ने अधिकार छैन
गीतको पो म हुं मेरो गीत हैन

I have no right to call this my song.
The song doesn't belong to me, I belong to the song. 🇳🇵

Ben Ayers is a humanitarian, documentary filmmaker, and National Geographic Explorer based in Kathmandu.



SMELL OF MUSIC

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.

around, and his songs about love and loss were real, lived experiences. He tapped into the sublime melancholy of the soul -- the kind of thing that led his contemporaries in the American South to coin *the blues*.

In 1961, under the tutelage of King Mahendra, His Majesty's Government founded Ratna Recording Sansthan which paired with Radio Nepal to press records of Nepali national music. Most of the recording was done in Nepal or India on old reel-to-reel tapes, then shipped off to Calcutta or Japan for pressing onto vinyl. (There are rumours of records made in the former Soviet Union but these remain as



EVENTS

**The Art Market**

The Art Market resumes as we usher into 2021. The bi-monthly event is a platform for artists to exhibit their creativity, which may come in any form.

2 January, 1pm, Timro Concepts Store

**New Years' Bazaar**

Dhokaima is organising New years' bazaar with 11 stalls. Local businesses and brands ranging from TeaFresco to Higher Ground Crafts will be present.

13 January, 2-6pm, Patan Dhoka

**BBQ at Hyatt**

Welcome 2021 with an extensive New Year's BBQ dinner at Rox Restaurant. For bookings visit their website.

1 January, 6pm, Hyatt Regency Kathmandu

Paint like Vincent Van Gogh

In this gently guided session, try out some of the techniques that iconic artists 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.

16 January, 1:15pm

**Hike for Nepal**

Kick start 2021 with a group of professionals and expert guides specialising in cultural heritage tours, travel, hiking and trekking. This time, along the trails of Bhardev to Lele. Registration required.

2 January, 7am

Saglo Samaj

In its second episode, *Saglo Samaj* takes on the epidemic of cancer in Nepal. The tv magazine produced by Himalmedia provides a complete perspective on Nepali society with solution-oriented coverage.

New episode: *Cancer Katha*
8:30pm, 4 January, Sarokar TV,
Dish Home Channel #130



No westerly on the horizon, which means a hazy, cloudless weekend ahead. The sun will be filtered by pollution so the maximum temperature will stay below 20. However, on Sunday the wind direction will change to south bringing warmer air and making it unseasonably warm from Sunday onwards with the minimum temperature creeping up to 7-8 Celsius. Early next week, it will almost be spring-like sunshine in Kathmandu Valley. But Nepal's farmers are hoping for some winter rain and snow to break this two-month drought.

FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
 19° 3°	 19° 5°	 21° 7°

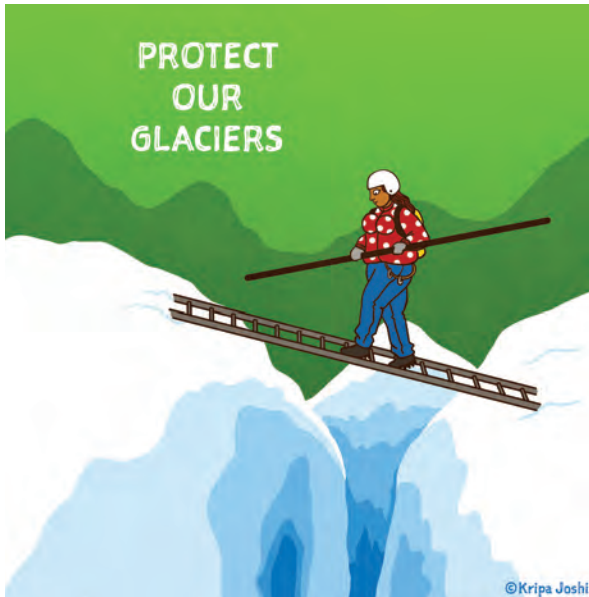
AIR QUALITY INDEX



There is a staggering amount of smog blanketing the Indo-Gangetic plains. As this map from the World Air Quality Index Project (<https://aqicn.org/map/india/>) shows, the concentration of hazardous particulate matter below 2.5 microns is off the charts in the New Delhi suburb of Noida. It is at 999 because the measuring equipment cannot handle more than 3 digits. Kathmandu Valley was only slightly better, with AQI at 192 which is in the 'Very Unhealthy' band. Do not expect things to improve because winter inversion in the plains, as well as Kathmandu Valley, will trap pollutants at ground level.

ECOLOGIC WITH MISS MOTI

KRIPA JOSHI



Global warming is causing glaciers to retreat 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 hydroelectricity 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, an outburst would cause massive damage to life downstream. Glaciers are early indicators of climate change and we need to reduce global CO2 emissions. #FridaysForFuture



OUR PICK

QFX Cinemas is now open and showing 2020 science fiction horror film *The Invisible Man* directed by Leigh Whannell and loosely based on the novel of the same name by H. G. Wells. The film follows Cecilia who thinks her abusive wealthy ex-boyfriend faked his death to become invisible and torment her. Elisabeth Moss of *The Handmaid's Tale* fame stars.

बालबालिका माथि हुने हिंसा, दुर्व्यवहार, शोषण भएको, जोखिमपूर्ण अवस्थामा रहेको वा बालअधिकारको उल्लंघन भएको छ भने बाल हेल्पलाइनको पैसा नलाग्ने
फोन: नं. १०९८ मा खबर गरौं।



नेपाल सरकार

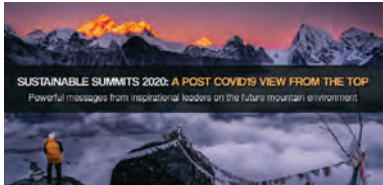
सञ्चार तथा सूचना प्रविधि मन्त्रालय

सूचना तथा प्रसारण विभाग

ONLINE ARCHIVES

**Journeyman Pictures**

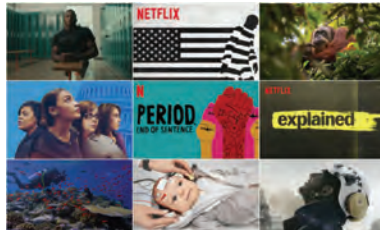
Watch groundbreaking factual films about some of the hottest topics from across the globe including on politics, the environment, and the current pandemic. Find Journeyman pictures on YouTube.

**Sustainable Summits 2020**

Listen to Sustainable Summits 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.

**Boju Bajai**

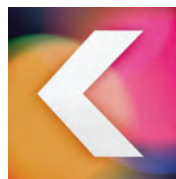
Listen to Itisha Giri and Bhrikuti Rai as they talk from across two continents about politics, media and feminism in South Asia.

**Free Netflix documentaries**

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

Seeker

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



DINING

**The Vesper House**

Every serving reflects the Italian lifestyle: simple, vibrant, yet subtle and aesthetically presented. The Vesper House is popular for their continental cuisines and fine wines.
01-5548179

Kung Fu Noodles

Noodle lovers, summon! A small Chinese restaurant with a wide variety of noodles and fragrant soup toasted with sesame oil. Some of their ingredients are from China.
985-1172950

**Yellow Pomelo**

Located in Jhamsikhel, Yellow Pomelo promises good food and good time. Check out their specials: Royal Yellow Pomelo Burger, Buffalo Wings and Club Sandwich.
981-3289975

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.
986-0913902

**La Casita**

At La Casita, you can enjoy one of the finest views of Boudha with the mountains peeking from behind the hills. Visitors love their tapas.
01-4915645



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 डोको 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 *बाटो* *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.

While some villagers are concerned about the possible loss of land and homes as the excavators arrive, the contractors worry about possible disruption and dissent by local communities. And there is the government in the form of Roads Division that is concerned about the emergent illegal road-side structures and encroachment of public land.

This 82-minute film immerses viewers into the reality of roads in rural Nepal. It makes us think about the distinct meanings and consequences of roads and road-building for the protagonists involved — villagers, contractors, traders, the government.

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 these 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 those 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 *बाटो* 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.

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Khukri

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NATION

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BIPUL CHETTRI
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THE AXE
THE ELEMENTS

and also **TOP-16 announcement**

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Khukri Rum You Tube Channel



DishHome

1st Jan 2021, 6:00 PM onwards



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.



LIFE TIME

Anjana Rajbhandary

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 unforeseen emergencies. In life, you never know. I was aware that some people would think me irresponsible for traveling during this time, and that my action would be met with anger and resentment.

I was 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

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 sanitisers and moisturisers as security provisions for three flights and two layovers. The flight from Chicago to Frankfurt was practically empty.

Frankfurt airport was busier than O'Hare, and travelers 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, eat, 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 wifi at 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 delights 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 this fortnightly Nepali Times column Life Time about mental and physical health and socio-cultural issues.



LIFE TIME

With the New Year, we are introducing new columns and new columnists. Mental health counselor and researcher Anjana Rajbhandary is starting a fortnightly column 'Life Time'. Watch her vlog where she talks about anxiety while travelling during the time of Covid.



PMO

FELLOW COMRADES: Guo Yezhou of the Chinese Communist Party with China's Ambassador to Nepal Hou Yanqi in talks with Prime Minister K P Oli in Kathmandu this week.



RSS

OUT OF CONTROL: A wildfire has been raging out of control for the past five days near the summit of Pathivara in Taplejung district.



DINESH KAFLE

MOUNTAIN LITERATURE: Economist Biswo Paudel addresses the IME Nepal Literature Festival in Pokhara on Tuesday amidst a backdrop of the Annapurnas.



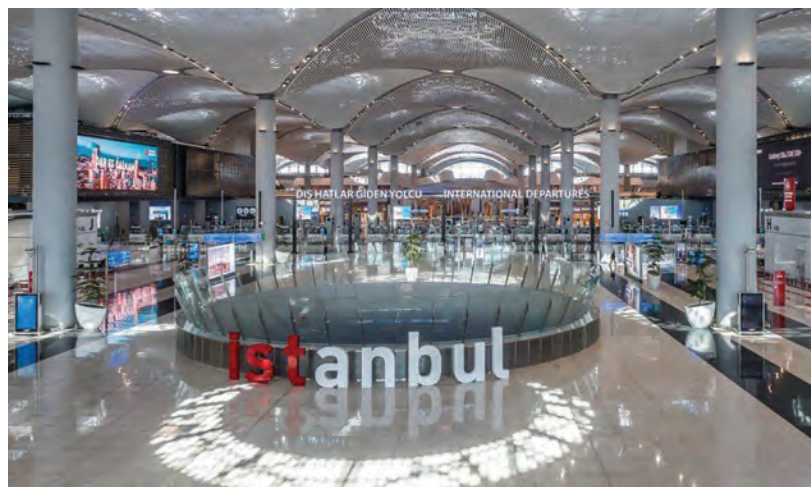
BIKRAM RAI

SUPER-SPREADER: Hundreds of mainly maskless people attended Cobweb Christmas indoor concert held at the Lord of Drinks club in Thamel last week.



BIKRAM RAI

BUSINESS AS USUAL: Thousands of cadres join top leaders Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Madhav Kumar Nepal as their faction of Nepal Communist Party protest Prime Minister K P Oli's decision to dissolve the Lower House.



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

Ring in the old in 2021

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 Chamoinix 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 had to be postponed. The organisers released a 50-minute video in which leaders and experts spoke about the impact of the climate crisis on 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 underneath houses in Khumbu,” says Lisa Choegyal, 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 lasting change,” Choegyal 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 Taragaon Museum, Patan Museum, The Chhauni Museum, Siddhartha Art Gallery, and the Bahadur Shah Baithak. 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 (NIFF) barely managed to be held in February just as the pandemic was spreading. But other events such as the Pame Film Festival, the Nepal Human Rights International Film Festival (NHRIFF), and KIMFF went virtual during the tail end of 2020, which meant that a large number of viewers including the Nepali 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 Covid 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, tae kwon do, 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 *Nepali 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 Olympics Committee has informed us that all participating Olympians 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.” 🇳🇵

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The death of print is exaggerated

It could be that the obituaries for printed newspapers and magazines were somewhat premature

● Alisha Sijapati

The Year of Covid hit economies hard, and none 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 media in Nepal stopped their print editions. *Nepali Times* and *Himal Khabarpatrika* were one of the first to stop printing in early March, and went fully digital. National broadsheets 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 slimmer versions of their papers, 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 pausing print production was a near-fatal decision," admits Mahesh Swar, Assistant General Manager at Kantipur Media Group. "We did lose some confidence of our readers, but we have won most of it back. Resuming print was the best decision we made."

Although it was a question of



MONIKA DEUPALA

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 flatlined during the March-July lockdown. The prognosis for 2021 is looking only slightly better.

A handful 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 the Centre for Investigative Journalism (CIJ) told this paper that the resumption of hardcopy was

prompted by competition, and the fear of losing a paper's footprint.

"It is true digital media has even more reach during the lockdown, but the publishers seem to have decided that not having a printed newspaper has reduced their clout," Gaunle says. "In that respect, print is still king."

A survey earlier this year by Sharecast Initiative showed that only 7% of a nationwide sample regularly read print media, while the proportion of people who got 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 Madhu 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."

Journalist Namrata Sharma believes that older people prefer a physical newspaper because they are in the habit of reading them with their morning cup of tea. "Newspapers are just much easier to read, the letters and pictures are bigger and they do not have to squint into phones," she says.

The Sharecast survey shows that the readership of news portals is not much higher, and most people with smartphones use the internet for entertainment, to connect to family and friends and to watch or share video content. Some 80% of respondents in the survey are on Facebook, with the total number of Nepalis with the app at nearly 9 million. YouTube and TikTok are spreading rapidly as well. Three years ago, only 1% used YouTube, that has grown to 57% in 2019.

Acharya says print readership can grow if newspapers and magazines are more readily available to subscribers and in news-stands because of greater literacy levels. Print's advantage is its shelf-life, and the size of images, which has an edge over a mobile phone screen.

"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 screen," says Amar Gurung, CEO at Himalmedia, which is resuming the print edition of *Nepali Times* every Friday from 1 January.

At the Kathmandu University

(KU) Department of Language and Media, most students are digital natives who want to have careers as multimedia journalists.

Even ad agencies feel that print is a more credible source of information for the public, but they say that legacy media has to re-invent itself to be more appealing to advertisers and readers.

"Print publications have a more loyal readership, and they perceive them as more credible than online," says Ujaya Shakya of Outreach Nepal, and author of *Brandsutra*.

He adds that print readers do not usually multitask when they read a magazine or newspaper, making them more receptive to ads in those publications.

However, Shakya says the penetration of digital media is growing faster, and it will gain momentum when it is integrated with print, tv or radio.

"The biggest challenge for marketers now is the attention span of the digital audience," Shakya adds. "How many times will they click on the banner ad while browsing social media or a site? That is the key question."

It may be a question of time before print is trending again, just as people get tired of digital sound and vinyl record shops are becoming fashionable (see page 8-9). Physical newspapers are tactile, their influence is less ephemeral than digital, much like e-books never really took off as people preferred to turn physical pages. The sale of printed books worldwide doubled last year.

"A newspaper in your hand is much more real than digital words on a monitor. There is more trust and credibility in a physical paper in this age of fake news," says Amar Gurung. "Readers of print also tend to read longer articles and are less distracted, whereas online readers prefer shorter items or videos."

This may be the reason why despite the growth of digital readers, many advertisers in Nepal still prefer ads in print. Indeed, across the world there is a return to print advertising by companies who are turned off by the over-saturation of online, and people disabling ads because they feel pursued by algorithms.

"Traditional media's major source of revenue has been ads. But now, we have to think out of the box to generate revenues from other sources as well," says Gurung.

To be sure, there are caveats to print. The content and production values have to be of extremely high quality, there has to be visibility and efficient distribution that makes the media brand stand out. In the end it will be the advertisers who have the last word.

Says Prasun Timilsina of Karyala Advertising, "For advertisers, it mostly depends on the audience. While products for youth are usually on digital media, it still makes sense to advertise in newspapers because they are tactile and there is greater retention of content that people see in print. A newspaper is also shared by the entire family, as opposed to digital media which is individual,"



Watch video of *Nepali Times* readers explain what they have missed the most about the hardcopy editions in the past 10 months, and why they are glad the paper is resuming its paper edition from 1 January 2021.



Nepal goes online shopping in 2020

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

● Sonia Awale

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

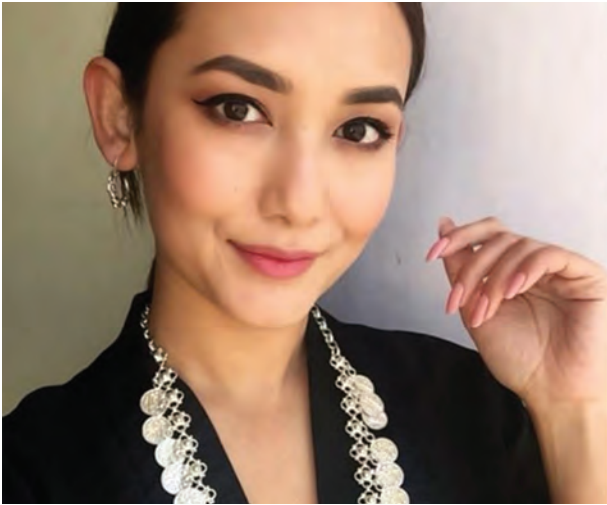
The store has seen its online sales peak despite the pandemic, making for up to 70% of total transactions. Encouraged by their success, the owners opened Nakkali, to sell gold-plated jewellery. Up to 90% sales are currently conducted through digital platforms.

“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 Labim 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 Jewelry and



Actress Shilpa Maskey in Maya Handicrafts Jewellery’s Asarfi mala necklace and Former Miss Nepal Shrinkhala Khatriwada promoting her own line of Glambisque palette.

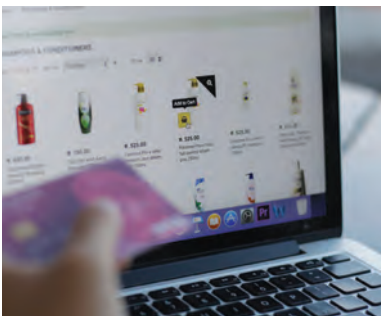


Glambisque use social media sites like Instagram and Facebook, to market their products. Increasingly, more companies are also using e-commerce platforms like Daraz and Sastodeal to advertise their goods.

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, Saniaa 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.

Hamrobazaar 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 the most enquires in this Nepali version of eBay.

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

Bibek 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 desert store that specialises in Nepal’s

authentic and traditional sweets (such as Gundpak and Pustakari) with modern touch.

Not all businesses have found the trend towards online shopping as encouraging. Despite demand and overwhelming enquiries, Misumi Korean cosmetics in Labim 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 Alibaba 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 not if we improve consumers’ online shopping experience,” says Manohar Adhikari of Foodmandu.

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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 smelly loos, we can thankfully still feel perfectly at home there.
6. Domestic tourism got a whole new meaning in 2020 with Buddha Air's promo stopover in Pokhara for Janakpur-bound passengers.
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.
11. The bottom line, FYI, is that the only way to survive 2021 is WTF to LMFAO. G2G. TTYL.



The Ass

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