That Nepal’s political leadership does not care about the health of its people is abundantly clear from its handling of the Covid-19 crisis. But they do not seem worried even about their own health.

This week, politicians attended crowded indoor meetings without adequate Covid-19 precautions. And Kathmandu’s worsening air pollution crisis, which they have done nothing to address, also affects their own lungs.

On Wednesday morning, the Air Quality Index (AQI) was in the maroon ‘Hazardous’ range in Singha Darbar (380), Minister’s Quarters in Pulchok (380) and the official residence of the president at Shital Nibas (380).

Although AQI on Wednesday had improved after surpassing a record 500 on Monday and Tuesday, it was still at a very harmful level. In Kopanholo, Triparvereo and Kalkati, AQI was above 450. By afternoon, bright sunshine and a fresh westerly blew the smog away.

Kathmandu’s pollution is also clear proof of governance failure: corruption in emission checks, lack of political will to relocate brick kilns, and inability of municipalities to control garbage burning.

Last year, the Cabinet decided to declare a health emergency if AQI exceeded 300. If it followed its own rule, there should have been an emergency every day this week.

“People blame weather for poor air quality but we are polluting the air throughout the year. Only on Monday and Tuesday, the pollutants were trapped and had nowhere to go,” says clean air activist Bhushan Tuladhar.

Experts say the bad air on 4-5 January was due to open fires, brick kilns, vehicular emission, wildfires in the mountains, and cross-border smog combined with winter inversion trapping pollutants in the bowl-shaped Valley.

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Most major media this week replaced political news with headlines about the pollution crisis. But as blue skies returned, people thought the worst was over, whereas air quality was still at very dangerous levels.

Even more lethal are poisonous invisible gases like carbon monoxide, nitrous oxides, sulphur dioxide and surface ozone, mainly emitted by motorcycles. Masks do not protect us against those.

While pollution spikes are worrying, long-term exposure to dangerously dirty air can reduce average life-span by nearly four years. A report last year said air pollution was directly responsible for 42,100 deaths in Nepal in 2019.

“Air pollution is a long-term problem that needs policy level change. It should go hand in hand with education and awareness which are the precursors to clean air,” says Shisir Sharma of the group Dhristi Kathmandu that monitors air quality.

The good news is that this week’s pollution emergency has public concern about health risks, especially its links with Covid-19. Says Bhushan Tuladhar: “We can make choices. Ride a Safa tempo, or bicycle. Brick kilns can be cleaner. Truck emissions can be controlled. There is a solution to pollution.”

Between 8-9 AM on 6 January, Nepal Times reporters fanned out across the city with ambient air quality monitoring kits. At every point, Combined US AQI readings showed above 300 – more than 10 times higher than the WHO’s safe threshold. And that was on a good day.

Sonia Awale

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Sonia Awale
NUMBER OF TOURISTS IN NEPAL

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good times. The New York Times, which has been running since 1851, and a number of other national newspapers have been setting new standards for the digital age. The New York Times is one of the most influential newspapers in the world, with a circulation of over 2 million copies per day. The newspaper publishes news, commentary, and opinion pieces on a wide range of topics, including politics, business, culture, and sports. The New York Times is known for its high-quality journalism and in-depth coverage of important events. It is considered an essential source of news and information for people around the world.
TIME TO MEET AGAIN: TORONTO

Have a healthy journey with all precautions taken down to the smallest detail for your in-flight safety.
The vagaries of fate

In her last column, Lisa Choegyal takes us on the Trans-Siberian Railway during the Soviet days

I was my Dr Zhivago fantasy period, and I had this wild idea that it would be compelling to travel solitary by that all the way from Japan home to Britain – in winter.

‘How I envy you that railway journey,’ wrote Jan Morris, who fully appreciated the ‘special grace’ of travelling alone. Several days were spent transecting by train the massive expanses of the Soviet Union, and an uncertain seasonal ferry across the Sea of Japan to the east Siberian port of Nakhodka.

We disembarked at Omok, or was it Tomsk, and the teeth-chattering cold was such that breath crystallised on a window pane if anyone was unwise enough to open their mouth. The grey platforms, steaming wheels and Stalin silhouettes were discouraging, and I quickly climbed back into the carriage.

I remembered that time on the Orient Express when helplessly I watched the train with all my worldly belongings aboard chug out of the station – the stuff of nightmares – only to miraculously stop beside a tiny village.

The train windows were permanently edged with ice and the monochromatic views were truly bleak, but inside the atmosphere was cozy and encompasing. Large Russian ladies carried covered baskets of black bread and strong sausage with which I was plied.

I had no such alarms on the Trans-Siberian, just surviving the bitter sub-zero temperatures every time I ill-advisedly alighted at a halt, and navigating the food where an expensive menu always seemed to have everything ‘off’ and only thick soup ‘on’. This became routine in the prescribed Intourist world of Soviet tourism, and was rather alarming at first. I adapted fast.

Fenian rivers became smooth wayfairs for the winter trucks, and across a pristine snowfield the railway line just survived. It was during the mighty minutes that it did not take long to realise that these国道 figures were worried about my slender frame at nearly six feet tall and nicknamed me back at Tiger Taps in Nepal, I was unmanifest with feeling dainty and delicate, never more before since.

It was the winter of 1974 and I was returning from Nepal — the long way round. Following a solitary trek to Jomsom and a solitary trek to Jomsom and

Nepal Telecom users, 4.08 million through Ncell, and 199,000 who are on Smart Telecom. Meanwhile, 5.3 million users have fixed cable and wireless broadband, with 4.6 million among them using wireless services.

Nepal’s biggest IPO: Nepal Infrastructure Bank Limited is raising initial public offerings for general public from 15 January and has appointed NBL Ace Capital Limited as its issue manager. This is the biggest IPO in the history of Nepal’s capital market with 30 million units worth Rs 6 billion.

Everest Bank 100th branch

In its bid to provide banking facilities across the country, years ago, and the long afternoon shadows of the Indian Embassy Residence reached us across the gently sloping and perfectly mowed lawn — white stucco columns, spreading balconies and stately colonial bluffing of the two story house first constructed for the British and handed over shortly after Independence. I felt the distant presence of Brian Hodgson, the first British resident to inhabit the bucolic hallowed grounds of Latumap, depicted in this garden supposedly with his Modern concept. The contemporary drawing has a picturesque primrose charm, that seemed strangely distant from the gathering of literary luminaries.

The scent of roses mingled with that of my be-saried neighbours as we settled into the husky padded chairs to enjoy a dinner in a small stately house in front of the hegions. The subject was a book on mid-twentieth century life in the Kumaun hills by an esteemed Indian author swathed in cashmere and silk.

I can’t cope with this nostalgia nonsense. ‘The Indian ambassador’s face beneath his perfect turban was crumpled with naivete. ‘We have to move forward from the Raj, away from those battalions of white men, into the current reality. Romanticising the hill station life into a forgotten yesterday does none of us any favours. He fixes me with a steady gaze: ‘Nor all that Raj publish about polo in the jungle. ‘My most recent column in Nepali Times. I have no trouble agreeing. Writing with my words has been a born-for-the-task in this space for the last three years. I pride to think of my article as recalling living history, as background context to today’s evolving environmental issues and tourism landscape.

Without even a nod to nostalgia, there are many hard-hitting lessons learned from the impressive track record on tourism and conservation of which Nepal should be proud. After 100 articles and three years, Lisa Choegyal is closing her So Far So Good fortnightly column. All her past pieces are available at the www.nepalntimes.com archives.
From one emergency to another

Responding to crises has become a calling for the Bhaktapur’s Covid volunteers

Monika Deupala

The volunteer group RNA16 shot into the limelight in May 2020 after it handled the first coronavirus death in Nepal at a time when there was extreme stigma about the disease.

Eight months on, they continue to conduct rescue missions for other crises besides Covid-19, and the group has grown from four to ten.

“We have handled close to 26 Covid bodies,” says Arun Sainju, who leads the team that works closely with the Nepal Army in handling the coronavirus casualties.

Sainju and his team were awarded a national medal by President Bidya Devi Bhandari in September 2020. They also received the Gallantry Award First-class from Nepal Scouts in October.

RNA16 is a short form for ‘Rescue And Awareness in 16’.

The bulk of its work comprises handling not just disasters, safety to health institutions, hospitals, and community health groups.

During last year’s monsoon, the team also was called to respond to landslides in Sindhupalchok where it conducted rescue.

“Last two months were quite busy with training sessions,” says Sainju, who has just returned from Sola Khumbu after training 134 staff in dealing with Covid epidemic response.

“Arun Sainju is a Scout for more than 35 years,” says Gainju, 30, who has been a Scout for more than half his life. With skills in rope rescue, he has had an adventurous life, plucking people trapped on mountains and in rivers. His temerity was first tested during the Nepal earthquakes of 2015.

During the 2015 earthquakes, he helped rescuing people during landslides, floods—even the crash of the US Bangla flight at Kathmandu airport in 2018.

“Everything looks normal now despite the pandemic, people have started to go about their daily lives. We are probably learning to adapt to the virus situation. But there will always be emergencies for which we need to prepare,” says Sainju.

Gainju, 21-year-old, who is working to join the Nepal Police in the future.

“During the pandemic lockdown, he spent his days feeding an old couple in an isolation ward. When they recovered, he also helped them return home. ‘They wept in gratitude. Life has no purpose if one cannot use it to help people in need,’ he says.

Nhuza Kiju

Nhuza Kiju works as a computer operator in Bhaktapur Municipality. A Scout from a young age, he has also been active in local youth clubs. After the April 2015 earthquakes, he helped build temporary shelters.

“Since the pandemic started, he has also been helping the team in contact tracing Covid cases and assisting in preparing funerals for coronavirus victims. ‘It was very hard to see the grief of patients’ families not being able to see their loved ones,’ says the 21-year-old, who is working to join the Nepal Police in the future.

Besides her nursing skills, 23-year-old Karmacharya helps manage team communication.

The bulk of her work comprises collecting details of Covid-19 patients and guiding them through recovery procedures in hospitals.

Karmacharya wants to conduct awareness programs related to women’s health and hygiene in rural Nepal in future. She adds: ‘The hardest part of living in a tent for more than three months as a volunteer was not having proper toilet facilities, which made me realize how women’s needs during crisis can be different.’

Arun Sainju

Rajesh Gainju

Nhuza Kiju

Poonam Karmacharya

Poonam Karmacharya was the first female volunteer in RNA16. A staff nurse by profession, she joined the team four years ago, conducts self-defense training and is also involved in rescue, safety, and awareness programs.

Arun Sainju

Poonam Karmacharya

Nhuza Kiju

Monika Deupala

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Poonam Karmacharya
Nepal’s other pandemic: cancer

30 people in 3 neighbourhoods of a Tarai village have died recently of cancers

I started with persistent skin allergy for 15-year-old Uma Tamami Sah. She got a checkup at a laypency hospital in Dhamusa, and later in India. Doctors detected a growth in her lungs. The very next day she flew to Kathmandu where she was given six cycles of chemotherapy, twice a week and radiotherapy for 15 days. Sah is from Hariban municipality of Sarlahi district where 30 people have died in the past three years, seven others are undergoing treatment for various types of cancer.

The three neighbourhoods of the village have a population of 5,300. Extrapolating this figure nationwide would mean a death toll from cancer of a staggering 60,000 people all over Nepal in three years. Hariban village is at the tail of the Chure Range adjoining the Tarai. There is a well, and the fertile fields are perfect for vegetables which are taken to Kathmandu to be sold. But what brings the farmers prosperity could also be one of the reasons for the epidemic of cancer here.

Farmers are using herbicides and insecticides, some of them banned in Nepal. The water table is receding due to over-extraction and what comes out of the pumps is arsenic-laden. Cancer used to be so rare in Nepal that there is no word for it in the Nepali language. But Hariban could be a microcosm of the cancer sweeping the country. Cancer is now the fifth leading cause of death in Nepal, with lung, breast, cervix, skin and stomach cancers being the most common.

Approximately 28,000 new carcinoma cases are diagnosed every year in Nepal with mortality at 28,000, both at an increasing rate as per the Global Cancer Observatory estimates. But many more cases go undiagnosed due to lack of resources and insufficient screening.

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has added to the crisis. There are five times more funerals at the Pashupati cremation site in Kathmandu as compared to December 2020. While some could be people who died from the coronavirus, many others are thought to be patients with cancer or other chronic disease who could not get timely treatment.

Lockdowns and restrictions as well as four of contracting SARS-CoV-2 had affected patients of many chronic illnesses such as cancer due to reduced treatment and screening facilities. This in turn has likely resulted in more fatalities, say health experts.

Back in Hariban, Sah is now doing well after treatment. She says: “I’m lucky because my family could afford the treatment. I now plan to study sciences, be a nurse and care for patients like me. I want to help the poor and provide them treatment without cost.”

Rafi Miya also lives in the neighbourhood and has barely survived on income from farm. In addition to poverty, the family is burdened with cost of cancer treatment for himself and his son. Miya was diagnosed with throat cancer after a biopsy at Bhaktapur Cancer Hospital. “They operated on me and took the growth out, but my voice is hoarse now. We cannot get the medication here, and it is expensive.”

His son Lipla Miya’s cancer has affected his bowel and bladder functions. His treatment has already cost Rs200,000. Plokmir Devi Mahato Sundi also lives nearby, and started getting skin rashes, and suspects the jump in her breast is cancer. She cannot even afford to travel to get a checkup. Her husband Sanaj has asthma, and is despondent that he does not have the money for her treatment. “We have no money, without it there is no treatment. Doctors only treat those with money,” he says, pointing to his damaged spectacles, which he cannot afford to replace.

At Hariban’s Narayana Community Hospital, physician Anil Kumar Chaudhary confirms that there has been a steep rise in malignancies, and patients are referred to hospitals in Kathmandu or Bhaktapur.

“The is a steady stream of cancer patients from the surrounding villages, most have skin, liver, lungs and throat cancer,” says Chaudhary. “Those who can afford it go to India. The Nepal government provides Rs400,000 for cancer patients who cannot afford treatment, but this is negligible compared to the total bill. Most patients here seek treatment when the cancer is at an advanced stage, so they end up losing all their money as well as their lives.”

Another neighbour, Jagdile Sah suffered minor illnesses for a few years, but when he got sick during the pandemic, the doctors diagnosed him with third stage brain tumour. Surya Bahadur Sangat’s father was also diagnosed with last stage cancer and died within few months. Says Sangat: “He was admitted to hospital for 2-3 months, we lost all our money, and we also lost our father.”

The dramatic rise in cancer cases Hariban’s local government investigated possible contributing factors. Many residents depend on commercial vegetable farming, and there is rampant pesticide spraying.

With the depletion of groundwater, villagers have turned to shallow tubewells increasing the risk of arsenic contamination. A sample survey from community tubewells here showed the amount of arsenic at 0.6mg/l, several times higher than the safe limit of 0.05mg/l.

Near the village is the Indushankar Sugar Mill that buys sugarcane from local farmers and turns it into sugar and alcohol, getting toxic effluent into surrounding waterways. There are also 123 brick kilns in Sarlahi district, 16 of them in Hariban alone. Soot particles from the stacks can also be carcinogenic.

Says a local Dhanbahadur Chaising: “Farmers use pesticides elsewhere too, but why aren’t other villages also getting cancer? This probably means it has something to do with polluted water and arsenic contamination.”

Hariban Municipality has been forced to act. It is installing deep tubewells from up to 30m so that there is less chance of arsenic contamination of drinking water. The Indushankar Sugar Mill also dug a deep well and installed three tanks to store drinking water for villagers.

Progress in the alternative sources of water is slow, and it will take time to have an impact. In the meantime, young and old in Hariban face daily exposure to whatever is causing the cancer epidemic here. This Sarlahi village also has lessons for other parts of Nepal, which may also be exposed to the same risk factors.

Watch the second episode of Saglo Samaj: Cancer Katha on YouTube. The new episode takes on epidemic of cancer in Nepal.
Right gizmos at the right time
List of Top 5 gadgets to prepare you for whatever the new year has in store

TECH AWAY
Samia Shah

An Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) lab tested and certified product, its 4 UV bulbs carry out UVC sterilisation—a widely used method of dry killing pathogens—on products ranging from masks and gloves to groceries, parcels, toys, and documents. Medicines, batteries and power banks cannot be de-germed. With a capacity of up to 30 litres, Viroshield can be used to disinfect multiple items at once, saving time and energy, and is perfect inside home entrances, in the lobby, or the first room that you enter when you get home.

Price: NPR 18,790
Where to buy: www.cgdigital.com.np

Bliblu HEPA Air Purifier
If you are asthmatic or allergic to dust, pollen, pet dander, smoke, mould, mites, or bacteria, this air scrubber is your ally. If you are also extra sensitive to odours from pets or smoke, this may prove to be a smart purchase. The Bliblu 3-in-1 HEPA Air Purifier uses triple air purification with activated carbon and ionising technology to remove 99.7% of harmful allergens and pollutants. The device sits on a table and works quietly by itself, making it easy to leave in the kids’ bedroom or play room, so it does not disturb them while they sleep or study.

Price: NPR 7,090
Where to buy: www.gadgets.com.np

Portable Rechargeable Selfie Ring Light
For those who do not want to experiment and spend a couple thousand rupees on a 2m tall ring light with a tripod, here is a mini-version. During the lockdown we realised that camera ring lights are not just for conscious celebrities, but could come in handy when shooting a new TikTok video, or starting online office presentations. They up your image quality and make you look that much better. The tiny gadget comes with 3 selfie light and a USB cord to connect to your phone for a recharge. The clamping thickness of up to 15mm allows the ring light to be easily attached to most cell phone models. With 1.5 hours of charge time, it gives 2 hours of usage. The LED is bright enough for your selfie needs and has three levels of brightness, adjustable to different lighting conditions.

Price: NPR 1,500
Where to buy: www.gadgets.com.np

Netgear WiFi Range Extender EX6120
A WiFi range extender does just this alongside offering outstanding features and efficiency. The AC dual-band WiFi device covers a range of 111m2 and lets 20 devices to be connected at one time. It can repeat up to 1200 Mbps Internet speed and its FastLane technology makes it an optimum choice for users who stream HD content and play video games online. The compact form factor hardly takes up space and plugs in neatly in a wall socket. It works with any wireless router, gateway or cable modem, of any brand, as well as any up-to-date Internet browser (Safari, Firefox, Chrome, Internet Explorer, MS Edge). Netgear also offers 1 fast Ethernet port for maximum speed in wired devices such as a computer, video game console or a smart TV.

Price: NPR 7,999
Where to buy: www.unidura.com.np

Portable Photo Printer
While the sharing of digital images via social media platforms is all the rage, nothing beats the feel of a printed image that captures a cherished memory. The Huawei Portable Photo Printer enables you to bring to life your smartphone photographs through beautiful 513x368dpi prints. The printer conveniently slips into your pocket and all you need to do is take it out, connect it to your smart device via Bluetooth and press print to turn your images into momento.

Price: NPR 9,989
Where to buy: www.daraz.com.np

Huawei Portable Photo Printer
(Pocket Printer)

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Lightweight and compact, this brilliant little gadget uses inkless printing technology with a resolution of 313x490dpi, print speed of about 1 minute and comes with 10 sticky photo papers that you can keep replenishing. Whether you are travelling, getting together with friends and family or simply wish to gift someone a beautiful photograph, the Huawei Portable Photo Printer is just the thing to carry around and spread joy.

Price: NPR 2,440
Where to buy: www.bestdealsnepal.com.np

Where to buy: www.daraz.com.np

All it takes is the right gizmo at the right time for us to forget that we ever lived with tiny inconveniences and administered most tasks manually. From fancy disinfectants to air filters, gadgets become a way to improve health and quality of life, and these items are all available in Nepal. Investing in a WiFi range extender makes life easier, while gadgets like the ring light and pocket printers are not just trendy, but a bang for the rupee.

Techaway

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Techaway
Visionary artist brought out Mustang’s magic with pen, pencil and brush

Robert G Powell

Wednesday, 16 December 2020, marked the passing of a visionary artist who shared his unique perceptions of Asian architecture, art and culture with the world. With an eye beguiled by beauty and a heart attuned to the strange and ineffable qualities of physical heritage, Robert Gordon Powell was a magician with pen, pencil and brush.

Born in Australia in 1948, Rob was teaching art and studying architecture when the Baul clan just divided state of Bengal in India, came to perform songs, dance and rituals in his university town. This initial introduction to the human-spirit world deeply intrigued him, and the Bauls, who stayed at his home, recognised in him a kindred soul. Laxman Das Baul invited Rob to visit their Bengal village. Arriving at the teeming Howrah train station, riding the branch line through idyllic rice paddies and ending with an hour-longrickshaw ride deeper into mud-walled thatched-roof villages, the young man from ‘down under’ was transported into an utterly different reality.

While sketching and experiencing life in Bengal, Rob heard that Ladakh had recently opened to foreigners, and determined to visit there as well. His camera disappeared en route, being fate’s way of telling him what hand drawings were to be his primary means of documenting what he encountered.

This foray immersed him in Himalayan culture which became his most famous subject matter. He first documented Ladakhi buildings painstakingly with dots, the lightest possible method of rendition, well-suited to a patient artist and perfectly to the high mountain light, soft palettes of colours and often eroded surfaces of Ladakhi architecture.

Rob recorded architecture in Swat and Kalash Valleys of Pakistan, evolving a still detailed but faster illustration of light and shadow through cross-hatching in ink.

He documented the shamanistic culture of Western Nepal, portraying the initiation of a female shaman who meditated all night on a makeshift perch of perilously few small branches lashed high on a pole above her village. He drew drums, amulets and drumsticks – ritual implements that shamans – used to mesmerise the world and captivate those journeying with them.

These ethnographically rich locales were sparse in material comforts, and Rob found his way to Kathmandu to more comfortably complete and develop paintings from his sketches. Here he became familiar with the Newa brick, wood and plaster architecture of the Kathmandu Valley. He recognised that temples and residences follow traditional shapes, incorporate sacred proportions, and create a feeling that resonates with community, professional, and visitor.

He turned to red pigment watercolours to depict the red brick and tile work, and used browns, creams and greys to show how time tempers wood, plaster and stone. He was commissioned to design the Green Pastures Hospital in Pokhara, a complex resembling monastic quarters in layout, with the warm detailing of a traditional, welcoming inn.

Early in Rob’s three decades in Kathmandu, he encountered the German government’s largest development project in the world at the time – the restoration and conservation of the traditional city of Bhaktapur. Fortuitously meeting its leader, the Austrian conservation architect Cetia Hagniiller and his wife Ludmilla before they departed on holiday, they commissioned Rob to produce eleven drawings of Bhaktapur, including the Kuthu Math priest’s house that they would later renovate as their exquisite traditional, welcoming inn.

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The coloured cliffs of Chaurakot, Mustang.
Monk’s quarters, Tsarang Gompa.

Rob Powell in his Koh Samui studio.

laden mountain-scape.

At the town of Lo, he spent hours on site, absorbing the forms and feelings of the buildings. He celebrated the rich red, white and black colours painted and poured down walls, to call forth the protection of the gods, Manjushri, Avalokitesvara, and Vajrapani on vulnerable building corners and doorways. He vividly highlighted the ram skulls and horns that are positioned above an opening to protect the inhabitants against malicious spirits.

When Rob met Mary Slusser, cultural researcher and author of Nepal Mandala, she was impressed with his virtuoso artwork and arranged for him to show at the Sackler Gallery, part of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC.

That exhibition, ‘Earth Door, Sky Door, Paintings of Mustang’ in 1999 introduced the global art world to Robert Powell. His works embraced and slipped beyond the boundaries of ethnography into apparitional forms that reflect the essence of the Himalaya. Michael O’Sullivan of The Washington Post said it well, ‘Robert draws buildings in an animistic way that reveals something that lies beyond what can be seen.’

In 1992, Rob married Lieve Aerts, a Belgian woman and teacher of yoga and chi gung, who became his partner for life. After three decades happily settled in the centre of the culture that he portrayed so well, Rob contracted a lung infection that left his health vulnerable.

Rehabilitating at length in Europe, he was advised not to return to the poor air quality of Kathmandu. Rob and Lieve moved to Koh Samui, Thailand, where he designed the Kamalaya spa and an exquisite home for themselves that encompassed huge hillside boulders, lush trees and a sublime view over the Gulf of Thailand.

In Thailand, Rob expanded upon the Himalayan themes that had fascinated him. Rams’ horns that protected the doors of Lo Manthang grew to a full, fantastical wall of hornery.

Mountainsides that had housed the awesome Bamyan Buddhas in northern Afghanistan were re-depicted with dakinis, looming, sensual female figures with small fangs to ward off treacherous foes.

Mountainsides that had housed the awesome Bamyan Buddhas in northern Afghanistan were re-depicted with dakinis, looming, sensual female figures with small fangs to ward off treacherous foes. He discovered new media, moving into acrylics to capture the brilliant, evanescent skies and water around them, and to explore singularly potent spiritual symbols.

In 2019 Andrei Jewell made the documentary, Enchanted Matter, capturing Rob’s life, art and philosophy. Sadly his health gradually deteriorated. He passed away with Lieve at his side, in a room heightened by a view to a brilliant, orange-flowered tree, with music and candles to accompany his final journey.

Robert will not be forgotten. He will live on in our memories as a beloved, gentle being and a prodigious creator of wondrous works of art, who encouraged us to let the strange and beautiful lift us into enchantment.
Herbal Workshop
Janiherbas Premus Sejja’s workshop about healing medicinal plants and flowers for everyday wellness and rejuvenation. Registration required.
10 January, 3 pm, Kade Ma Coffee, Jummelkhet
Maato
Gallery Maato invites an enthusiasts to Maato inaugurated Maato Art Prize 2020 artist Zoe Williams. Visit the website for more.
8 January, 3.45 pm, Gailey Maato
Earthquake Safety Day
Earthquake Safety Day will commemorate the 8.5 magnitude mega-earthquake of 16 January 1934 and will remember the loss of lives and property that resulted from the 2015 earthquake and subsequent aftershocks.
16 January

Boudha Farmer’s Market
The Farmer’s Market serves as a place of interaction between clients, farmers and artisans. Facilitating discovery, debate, and tasting. Get organic vegetables, fruits, homemade goodies and more.
Saturdays, 5 am, Jupani Cafe, Boudha

Wine and Canvas
Mihiha is set to welcome 2021 with some wine and art sessions by Mihiha artist. Register to visit and learn basic Mihiha art and have a glass of delicious wine from the Vesper House.
9 January, 12 pm to 3.30 pm, Oshoima Cafe

Maghe Sankranti
The first day of the Nepali month of Magh marks the southward march of the sun, and heralds longer and warmer days. Spend the day with family and fill up on chaake, khe laddu, and tarul.
14 January

Tasty
This is the time to broaden culinary horizons. If there was one app that was made for millennials, it’s Tasty. The Tasty website and mobile app has hundreds of recipes to choose from, and quick’n easy to videos.

British Council library
The British Council Digital Library is making it easier to download books for free and read it on the go. Sign up for free and unlimited access to books, audiobooks, newspapers, magazines, comics and short films from around the world. Register for free until 31 March.

Photo.circle visual stories
Photo.circle has created a series of stories called Nepali ball. The four in Pictures is 15 visual storytellers based across the country who documented their communities from the beginning of the lockdown. Browse through the archive.

Earthquake Safety Day
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16 January

This was the week AQI in Kathmandu Valley hit a hazardous Air Quality Index (AQI) of 600 and above. At atmospheric conditions were not good, but the wind was just not strong enough to carry away the smog. But on Wednesday, AQI was back to a Moderate 64 as a westerly disturbance on the horizon into next week to bring in warmer days. Spend the day with family and fill up on chaake, khe laddu, and tarul.
14 January

Nani’s Kitchen
Nani is a well-designed rooftop restaurant showcasing the Bhadgaun Stalin Supa in all its glory. The meal needs a diverse mixture of local and western cuisine.
Boudha (01) 3426915

Yangling Tibetan Restaurant
Popular among tourists and locals alike, Yangling is affordable, cozy and serves one of the juiciest meaty dumplings alongside steaming Tibetan butter tea.
Kathmandu (01) 4257408

French Creperie Kathmandu
A very French uses in the centre of Thamel, French Creperie serves some of the finest crepes in town.
Thamel: (01) 5362010

Dish Home is currently streaming Turkish television drama Atidyss which revolves around Mahir Kara, who joins court of Istanbul’s law firm to fight his father’s case who is hitched up with a murderer he did not commit. The story unfolds as it takes viewers back to the 1970s, Istanbul and stars Kerem Issev, Engin Akyurek and Ilknur Kacar.

This series was started a year ago in light of awareness of our ecological crisis. Every human being has the fundamental right to a safe living environment. This series was started to protect this right to all of the climate change. The series invites to hold governments and polluting corporations accountable and the people to demand meaningful climate action. We need a sense of solidarity and political pressure on leaders to act for the long-term interests of humanity. The series shows us how the whole world can come together and adjust to face a crisis. Watch the series drawn in a close today, and be heard a voice from the series which is one in a million people who need a sense of solidarity and political pressure on leaders. For people and the planet. Our personal actions, our daily actions, truly makes a difference.

This EcoLogic series was started a year ago to raise awareness of our ecological crisis. Every human being has the fundamental right to a safe living environment. This series was started to protect this right to all of the climate change. The series invites to hold governments and polluting corporations accountable and the people to demand meaningful climate action. We need a sense of solidarity and political pressure on leaders to act for the long-term interests of humanity. The series shows us how the whole world can come together and adjust to face a crisis. Watch the series drawn in a close today, and be heard a voice from the series which is one in a million people who need a sense of solidarity and political pressure on leaders. For people and the planet. Our personal actions, our daily actions, truly makes a difference.
Welcome to suburbia

Meet Jyoti, leader of a group of children living on Kathmandu's outskirts

H

er hair is up in a pony tail some days. Some days, she wears it in pigtails. I rarely get to see her face up close, but watching her from my balcony I can tell that she is mostly laughing. Her eyes, if not her throat. She is called Jyoti.

I have known Jyoti for less than a year. When we moved to Kathmandu’s suburbia, we came to a place packed with three-storey houses that had quickly replaced paddy fields. All houses here look similar. Each is two and a half-storey, mostly built on chaar-aana lands, with pointy rooftops, popularly known as ‘namaste’ in the local construction lingo.

The only thing that gives the houses some character is their colour. They come in the brightest hues you can imagine—from parrot green to fuchsia. This is the colour. They come in the brightest hues you can imagine—from parrot green to fuchsia. This is the
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...
A Year of EcoLogic with Miss Moti

Miss Moti is a body positive character that I created to deal with my own issues with weight and self-image. Over the years, she has become an outlet for my mental wellbeing. When I got postpartum depression following the birth of my daughter, I created the Miss Moti-vation series to evoke a more positive frame of mind. So, when I started to feel increasingly concerned about the state of our planet, I turned to Miss Moti once more and started the EcoLogic series that was a weekly feature in Nepali Times for the past year.

Eco-Anxiety is described by Psychology Today as ‘a fairly recent psychological disorder afflicting an increasing number of individuals who worry about the environmental crisis’. A lot of people feel overloaded at the magnitude of the problem and powerless as individuals. The FridaysForFuture movement and the proactiveness of young people around the world became my inspiration. As an artist I thought I could contribute through my art… I could raise my voice to help raise awareness of our ecological plight.

I started with an image of Miss Moti juggling materials that could be recycled. And, every week, as I researched for ideas, I gained more insight about the environment and tried to implement better practices. Over the course of the series I myself became more rigorous about recycling and about using reusable products. I switched to ecological cleaning products, changed to LED bulbs, turned off electric devices not in use and ditched sanitary pads to use period underwear. We reduced the amount of meat, and the things we bought. A few months into the series, the coronavirus pandemic started. We all had to change our way of living. New environmental threats like disposable masks appeared, and I could not promote some of obvious green practices, like encouraging the use of public transport. We needed to reduce flying, and it did highlight how we are all connected and dependent on each other. I had to also change some of my own misconceptions. Previously, I used to think that banning palm oil would help save rainforests and orangutans, but realised that palm oil is an efficient crop, producing more oil per land area than any other equivalent vegetable oil. Extracting the same amount of alternative oil would just threaten other habitats and species. I shifted my stance to focus on the sustainability of the palm oil industry instead.

I also learnt that making electric cars or harvesting renewable energy like solar, wind or hydropower have their own environmental impacts. Sometimes things are not just black or white, and one has to weigh risk vs benefit. The interconnected aspects of our lives create complex issues and we all need to lend a helping hand.

Every human being has the fundamental right to a safe living environment. Governments have the obligation to protect this right in the face of the climate crisis. We need to hold governments and polluting corporations accountable, and we need to stop their tactics to delay meaningful climate action. The year 2020 showed us how the whole world can come together and adapt to face a crisis. And as this series draws to a close today, and we herald a new year, it is important to remember that we need to continue to raise our awareness, and our voices, for people and the planet. Our personal choices, our daily actions, our purchases, and our voice makes a difference.

One Planet

EAT LESS MEAT

ONE PLANET

WE ARE ALL CONNECTED

HELPING HANDS: Deputy Chief of Indian Embassy Namgya Khampa hands over Rs306 million to CEO of Nepal Reconstruction Authority Shushil Gyewali for rebuilding schools affected by the 2015 earthquake.

PEACEMAKERS: Nepali United Nations peacekeepers, 36 of them women soldiers, being awarded UN medals for their service in SUDAN.

IN THE LINE OF FIRE: Lalitpur Fire Brigade during Fire Fighting, Rescue and Hazard Handling training last week with support from UNDP and EU Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid.

CLIMATIC EFFECT: View of a snowless Mt Machhapuchre with a wildfire on its slopes viewed from Pokhara this week, showing the impacts of climate change in the Himalayas.

TUNNEL VISION: A 2.38km highway tunnel under construction that will connect Nagdhunga to Kathmandu, shortening travel time by 45 minutes.

ONE MULTIPLE ROLES

IN THE LINE OF FIRE

PEACEMAKERS
Why do women entrepreneurs and female small business owners in Nepal have a hard time attracting capital to grow their businesses? A series of conversations I had with banks and female entrepreneurs a few months ago provided some insights.

Suppliers of capital (i.e., banks) said that they funded mostly those women entrepreneurs who could use land as collateral, and who came to them via impeccable references, which was a euphemism for ‘upper class’. They repeatedly termed women entrepreneurs as ‘risky’, adding that they did not offer business advisory services. As such, they were unable to advise the women on how to make the best use of the loans.

Once the loans were disbursed to women with such impeccable references, the female entrepreneurs had to pay the interest every month, and that was the extent of the financial relationship with the banks. Most banks said that they did not feel comfortable advertising or marketing their women-focused business financing schemes for fear of being said that was the extent of the financial relationships with the banks. Most banks said that they did not feel comfortable advertising or marketing their women-focused business financing schemes for fear of being ‘seen’ as focusing on women, essentially turning off potential customers. This discouraged them from talking to other women entrepreneurs.

Another entrepreneur started a business was not only a matter of having the necessary venture capital, but also having the right business plan and the right business acumen. She struggled not so much with finances, but how to operate the business, essentially turning the business, essentially turning it into a one-woman operation. Her business took off, and she was able to hire employees. This discouraged her from talking to other women entrepreneurs.

Another entrepreneur said that her lack of knowledge about negotiations and partnership management—skills, which would have saved her money. She wished she had a better grasp of financial knowledge which would have helped her manage cash better. All the female entrepreneurs I spoke to said that the female entrepreneurs, women who had long-standing social, cultural and professional ties to one another. They were not aggr or sensitive enough to the According to the study, Nepal women entrepreneurs had such high requirements that it was hard to attract foreign investment. Those constraints appear to be around growth capital and advisory services. Unless government policies, donor funds and private capital unblock these constraints, funding and scaling women-run and women-serving Nepali businesses remains a promise far short of its potential.

Nepali Times. He will focus on entrepreneurship, management, public policies and development as if Nepalis mattered.

Holding up half the economy

Nepali women entrepreneurs should not be an afterthought

Ashutosh Tiwari

CrossCurrent

A business was not only a matter of accessing finance but being prepared to access finance in ways that assure the lenders or capital providers that the women entrepreneurs would make good use of the invested capital.

Likewise, another entrepreneur said that all of the sources of funds, the most reliable are personal and family funds. These allow the women to get things started, but, after that, women get stuck as to how to leverage their credibility to access further funds from strangers and institutions. This way, she said, the valley of death—where most women-owned businesses either failed to grow further and continued to gasp for cash or stayed small without maximising their business potential.

Though Nepal’s laws around women entrepreneurship and women’s right to own assets have improved somewhat in recent years, they are still framed through a lens of patriarchy, which does not count women as possible economic beneficiaries, except as an afterthought. That women need to join the workforce is a given. That women can start businesses and scale them up well to provide jobs, is not. The constraints appear to be around growth capital and advisory services.

Unless government policies, donor funds and private capital unblock these constraints, funding and scaling women-run and women-serving Nepali businesses remains a promise far short of its potential.
Drawing a line in the sand

A year after activist Dilip Mahato was killed by the sand mafia, his family still seeks justice. Illegal mining continues unabated.

Bhrikuti Rai in Dhanusa

Each time Sangam Mahato passes the excavators scooping up sand from the Aushari River, it brings back painful memories of his brother, Om Prakash. Also known as ‘Dilip’, her brother had been protesting illegal sand mining, fighting for the conservation of the ecologically fragile Chure Hills.

Dilip was murdered on 10 January 2020, tortured and then crushed beneath the wheels of a tipper truck. He was only 24.

Yadav to MPs, condemned Dilip’s activism would cost him his life.”

Sanjay Mahato, 27

MURDERED
On Prakash ‘Dilip’ Mahato, 24
Sujpur, Dhanusa

Second oldest of his siblings, Om Prakash alias Dilip, was the ideal son — socially responsible, active in the community, and with hopes of supporting his family as an engineer. But on 10 January 2020, he was found dead on the banks of the Aushari river, beaten with iron rods and crushed under a tipper truck.

“People later told me that the miners would have buried me alive if it hadn’t been for the neighbours say Dilip was murdered by sand miners with whom he had altercations. The case is currently sub judice at the Dhamus District Court.

“My brother lost his life fighting against illegal sand mining,” says Sangam Mahato, Dilip’s sister.

ASSAULTED
Sanjay Mahato, 27
Bateshwor Rural Municipality, Dhanusa

On the night of 2 May 2020, Sanjay joined his friends and neighbours on a march to the Badahari River which flows near his home. They demanded excavating the river for sand to stop past the 6PM deadline. The argument escalated, and they were attacked while returning home. Sanjay was struck on the head by a metal rod and had to be rushed to a hospital in Kathmandu.

“I vaguely remember the first few blows before collapsing to the ground,” he says. “People later told me that the miners would have beaten me alive if it hadn’t been for the villagers who came looking for me.”

Since then, Sanjay is not as physically fit as he used to be, which has affected his family finances. As the sole breadwinner of a family of five, he is unable to provide for his family.

“I can’t lift heavy things anymore and my head still hurts because of the injury,” he says. “But I can’t stop working so I try to find light work.”

THREATENED
Nanda Kumar Silwal, 50
Mithila Municipality, Dhanusa

Last December, sand mining contractors on the Basahi River threatened to burn down Nanda Kumar Silwal’s house when he and his neighbours protested excessive sand extraction. A few weeks later, news came of Dilip Mahato’s murder and this sowed fear.

“Earlier, everyone would get together to confront contractors, but now they find excuses to not go to the river. People are scared now,” said Silwal. “Even those who used to take the initiative to organise villagers are fearful now.”

ATTACKED
Rajkaran Mahato, 28
Journalist

Rajkaran Mahato has received countless threats in his ten-year career in journalism, but nothing as serious as what happened last April. He was reporting on the activities of crusher companies in Gaushala of Mahottari district when he and his colleagues were chased by angry sand miners. The journalists tried to escape without anyone getting hurt.

“I have received several direct and indirect threats for my work, but nothing like this physical intimidation,” says Rajkaran.
of loose material like clay, which is less permeable,” Shah says. Indeed, farmers now need to go down 150m to pump up water to irrigate fields.

Moving between rows of cauliflower heads with a large knife, leaving the green leaves in place. But this harvest has come at a steep price. She pays nearly Rs4,000 each month just on electricity bills for a water pump which set up a quarter of her profits from annual cauliflower harvest.

“It’s getting harder every year to cover the plantation cost, but we have to pay for pumping the water. There is no other source of income here except farming,” she adds.

Existing government guidelines clearly state that industries need to maintain proper standards to protect the environment and the community they operate in, especially along the ecologically-sensitive Chure.

Excavation pits and ditches need to be filled in and levelled. These guidelines are often ignored. Contractors and sand miners on the watch. But companies are still openly mining rivers without permission. But companies are still openly mining rivers without permission.

“Drilling deep tube wells to cover the plantation cost, but we have to pay for pumping the water. There is no other source of income here except farming,” she adds. The Constitution clearly states that industries need to maintain proper standards to protect the environment and the community they operate in, especially along the ecologically-sensitive Chure. Excavation pits and ditches need to be filled in and levelled. These guidelines are often ignored.

“The government’s focus on creating water tanks by spending installing expensive water pumps while ignoring the exploitation in the Chure to continue is like pouring water into sand,” says journalist and activist Rajkaran Mahato from Mahottari district.

Bhrikuti Rai, a local activist, started the ‘Save Kamala River Campaign’ as he watched the river dying up slowly. Along with the Kosi and Bagmati rivers, the Kamala is one of the three primary rivers that start in the mountains and flow across Provinces 2 and 3 into India. There are dozens other rivers that flow down from the Chure.

“Drilling deep tube wells isn’t a long-term solution to the growing water shortage, because unless rivers and other water bodies go back to healthy levels, the water table will not recharge,” Yadav says. “For that to happen, we need to overhaul our idea of development, which relies so heavily on sand and gravel from the rivers.”

Urban expansion in the Tanai, coupled with a growing emphasis on road connectivity, especially since the local elections in 2017, have fuelled demand for aggregates from the rivers.

Nepal is the top importer of heavy earth-moving equipment in South Asia. Backhoe loaders, excavators and wheel loaders facilitate the country’s road building projects, that are taking up an ever-growing share of physical infrastructure budgets.

According to the Ministry of Finance, Rs109 billion was earmarked for infrastructure projects in 2018/19, which grew to Rs163 million the following year. This year, the budget allocation was reduced because of the pandemic, but construction projects have continued to a priority with Rs34.5 billion, nearly 18% of the federal budget earmarked for infrastructure.

Lives lost to negligence
In Mahottari, on the banks of the flood-prone Ratu River, the gouging of sand and gravel from pits as deep as 8m have left many cavernous ditches, which contractors have not bothered to fill up after mining.

Last year, 16-year-old Rohit Mishra of Bardihas drowned in a 6m deep pit left behind by sand miners on the Ratu River. Less than a month later, two more people drowned in abandoned ditches near riverbanks in Dhanusa.

Despite this, mining companies like the Churiya Mei Crushed Factory in Dhanusa, where Dilip Mahato was killed, are rarely penalised. Companies ‘black out’ the crimes by paying victims’ families compensation money.

These crimes continue under the watch of elected leaders, many of whom have a stake in the construction industry, according to Dhanusa-based environmental activist Som Prasad Sharma.

The mayor of Mithila municipality of Dhanusa, Hari Narayan Mahato’s family have reportedly invested in bulldozers and tippers. His son Roshan Mahato is also in the construction business, although the mayor denies having any investment in the business. An investigation in this paper has shown that a quarter of all local politicians in the 2017 elections had ties to construction companies and sand mining operations. This has made the work of environmental activists even more challenging.

Activist Som Prasad Sharma has taken up the issue of river conservation with local leaders and policy makers for years now. But he is a frustrated man.

“When we question elected leaders about the illegal mining happening under their watch, they say contracts were given to companies following due process,” he says.

Last May, a parliament environmental inspection team, led by assembly member Ram Chandra Mandal, visited mining sites along the Ratu River that fizzled guidelines. No action was taken.

Last year when Dilip Mahato was murdered, Province 2 had already issued a directive mandating conservation guidelines. But companies are still openly mining rivers without permission. Falgun Magar, Ward chair of Bardihas 7, is among the few elected leaders who have made stopping uncontrolled sand mining a priority, but without much success. He says contractors with political connections are just too powerful.

This year, we decided not to call tenders because mining would flood nearby villages,” Magar says. “But the Bardihas municipality didn’t listen, they see the rivers only as a source of revenue.”

One step forward, two steps back
In November, the Home Ministry announced that all illegal sand mining factories across the country would be shut down. But advocate Chiranjivi Bhattarai is more sceptical.

“These are all half-hearted directives to deceive the people into thinking that the government cares about these things,” Bhattarai says. “The nexus between the contractors, police and political leaders is too strong.”

The Constitution clearly states that the three levels of government can make their own policies on natural resource use. But the lack of oversight, a sense of ownership towards natural resources, and a business-political nexus has created this mess, says federalism expert CAAL Devkota.

“Unfortunately, our politics isn’t clean, which adds complexities around regulations when it comes to governing natural resources,” says Devkota.

Dilip Mahato’s family has set up a foundation to continue his environmental activism. Walking past the deep pits dotting the riverbed in Dhanusa worries Dilip’s father, Ram Jivan. He says: “It is too late to bring back my son, but limiting how much sand can be taken out could save lives and the environment.”

Sangam Mahato at the now closed Chunyamai quarry where her brother was killed.
As Nepalis go forth where no Nepali has gone before to the far corners of the Planet, they will come across words that will make them homesick for the land they have left behind. Nepalis in Malaysia, for instance, will break into a smile as they thank locals with a "tth mbk". Loosely pronounced, Terima Kasih could, under certain circumstances, mean "Your Mother Is a Goat". First-time Nepali visitors flying to Kuala Lumpur on Malindo Air have been known to break into collective laughter upon finding that the plane they are boarding means "Big Turd" (or words to that effect). And after takeoff there is more naughty merriment when flight attendants hand out sugar sachets that have the Malay words [BLEEP] and [BLEEP].

Something similar happens in Chennai at the Mahalingam Store. No, it’s not a sex toy store. It sells ‘Aachi’ condiments, ‘Gu’ Energy Gel, and an assortment of fine wine. There is one Japanese international retail chain that might also be hit if it ever opens up shop in Kathmandu. Although, Muji might need to put up signs warning customers that cursing is strictly not allowed inside.

The Ass