Nepal’s recent history has been marked by milestones popularly remembered as People’s Movements. The first one in 1990 got us a referendum on the absolute monarchy. In 2006, the people took to the streets for peace and democracy.

This week, after riot police beat up civic groups and hosed them down with water cannons, there were calls once more for another pro-democracy uprising. A video clip went viral of journalist and writer Narayan WaigelNiGhting the air with his fotocamera: “This is the beginning of a third people’s movement.”

There had been much larger protests in recent weeks against Prime Minister Oli’s dissolution of the Lower House on 20 December, but police had stood by. Why they had to use bullets and point blank water cannons against a small and peaceful march is inexplicable, unless it was to provide a backlash.

Previous pro-democracy street protests have seen the emergence of a new political order, except in 1980 when the referendum allowed the absolute monarchy to prevail. A decade later, protests led to a lifting of the ban on political parties, also paving the way for a constitutional monarchy. The 2006 protests were as much a movement for peace as it was against King Gyanendra trying to turn the clock back.

The winter of 2020-21 will be remembered as one where civic groups once more had to take to the streets against what they saw as an autocratic prime minister riding roughshod over the Constitution. So far, the protests have been dominated by cadre loyal to the anti-Oli faction of the Nepali Congress Party (NCP) as well as some pro-democracy activists. It has not yet galvanised the public, which seems to see it as largely a power struggle between top men in the ruling party who were unable to resolve their personal differences. This ego-clash has led to the virtual split of a party that had a commanding majority in Parliament with both factions competing for bigger street rallies.

After last week’s show of force by the Dahal faction, the Oli establishment is staging his own superpower street event on 3 February. Most analysts agree that if Oli and his arch-rival Pushpa Kamal Dahal could call a truce, the division in the party would evaporate.

Into the fray has plunged Ram Dev Gautam, a NCP secretariat member who has made no secret of his ambition to be prime minister even if he lost the 2017 election. On Wednesday, he launched a national campaign to unite the party, possibly with himself at the helm.

“Can not agree with either faction, both are at fault. I am trying to keep the party united,” Gautam told the media. “I have been in contact with Mr. Dahal and Prachanda to back to speaking terms.”

The opposition Nepali Congress has tried, unsuccessfully so far, to fill the void left by a weakened NCP. But it is the Hindustan Right NCP that has picked some wind on its sails, promising a Communist prime minister to resort to whoahostory by offering prayers at Pashupatinath, garlanded to the chin.

“This for the long time will remain the defining image of Nepali Communist Andhelik” wrote lawyer Somnath Dahal on Twitter.

Where does the course of politics go from here? Much will depend on the Supreme Court verdict, as the debates drag on and we keep piling up. Another case on Wednesday was a contempt of court against four former Chief Justices for questioning its independence.

“While the Supreme Court hears depositions, both parties are competing in using abusive language against each other and to organise bigger street t半岛,” says commentator Shekhar Kharel.

There is still a role for civil society to instill fresh hope as Nepal look beyond the same old faces. But there is a caveat. Every time young turks have risen up, the older political parties have made sure to delegate them to the second page.
New labour agreement, flying coffins, Hurricane Katrina, and a sting operation.

ONLINE PACKAGES

WHAT'S TRENDING

New labour agreement, flying coffins, Hurricane Katrina, and a sting operation.

20 YEARS AGO THIS WEEK

The weather in the north is cold and gloomy, but a new day has dawned and there is hope for warmer days ahead. The sun has come up, and the sky is filled with promise.

20 YEARS ago, the world was a different place. The Internet was in its infancy, social media had not yet been invented, and the idea of a global community was still a distant dream. But even back then, we knew that change was coming.

The year was 1994, and the world was beginning to change. The Internet was gaining momentum, and social media was just starting to take shape. It was a time of great potential, and we knew that the future would be bright.

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FLY SAFE
FEEL SECURE

Have a healthy journey with all precautions taken to the finest detail for your in-flight safety.

TURKISH AIRLINES
Panoramic encyclopaedia of the Himalaya

Himalaya: A Human History, is an exhaustive and sweeping account of the roof of the world.

Lisa Cheegeyal

B oth a soaring celebration and a somber reminder of unfolding environmental crises, the Himalayas are the highest mountain range in the world, accounting for more than 25% of the world's land surface. The range contains 14 of the highest peaks in the world, including Mount Everest, K2, and Lhotse. The Himalayas are the result of the collision between the Indian and Eurasian tectonic plates, which continues to this day, causing Earthquakes and tsunamis.

The Himalayas are a biodiversity hotspot and home to a diverse range of flora and fauna, including the one-horned rhinoceros, snow leopards, and various species of birds. The region is also home to a rich cultural heritage, with a strong influence from Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism.

The Himalayan region is also home to many ethnic groups, including the Sherpas, Tibetans, and Gurungs. These groups have a deep connection to the land and have developed unique cultural practices and traditions.

The Himalayas are a source of inspiration for many people around the world. They are a symbol of resilience and adaptation, and a testament to the power of nature.

The Himalayan region has been the subject of numerous scientific studies and research projects. Scientists are studying the effects of climate change on the region, as well as the impact of human activities on the environment.

The Himalayas are an integral part of the world's ecosystems, and their protection is crucial for the health of the planet. Governments and international organizations are working together to protect the region and its inhabitants.

In conclusion, the Himalayas are a testament to the power of nature and the resilience of human societies. They are a source of inspiration for all of us, and we must work together to protect them for future generations.

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Turkish PCR test partnership

Turkish Airlines has signed an agreement with Eurofins Genomics to provide PCR tests to business class passengers flying out of Kathmandu as part of its ‘PCR Test’ programme. The test will be offered to all business class passengers flying out of Kathmandu.

The agreement was signed by Turkish Airlines’ General Manager for Turkey, Faruk Yildiz, and Eurofins Genomics’ Managing Director for Turkey, Fatih Kayhan.

Global ME cashless banking

Global ME Bank has announced the launch of its new ‘ME Pay’ online payment system, allowing customers to make payments for various services and products using the bank’s digital wallet.

The bank is partnering with several companies to offer the service, including the Nepal Trust Bank and the Deposit Insurance and Resolution Fund (DIRF).

Ncell green lighting the Ring Road

Ncell, in collaboration with the Department of Forest and Soil Conservation, will be supporting the installation of street lights along the Ring Road in Kathmandu. The project aims to reduce energy consumption and improve road safety.

The bank is committed to supporting sustainable projects in Nepal, and this partnership is a testament to that commitment.

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HIMALAYA

A Human History

by Ed Douglas

FTUNE New York, 2021

524 pages, £70

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Wind power: a sustainable future?

Wind power is a proven and reliable source of renewable energy, providing a significant contribution to the world's energy mix. It is a clean and sustainable source of energy that can help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and combat climate change.

However, the deployment of wind power is not without challenges. It requires significant investment in infrastructure and can have environmental impacts, such as habitat destruction and bird and bat collisions.

Wind power is also subject to natural variations in wind speed and direction, which can affect the output of wind farms. This can make it difficult to integrate wind power into the grid and can lead to intermittency issues.

Despite these challenges, wind power remains a promising and viable source of renewable energy. Governments and international organizations are committed to increasing the deployment of wind power and tackling the challenges associated with its development.

In conclusion, wind power is a proven and reliable source of renewable energy that can help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and combat climate change. However, it requires significant investment and can have environmental impacts. Governments and international organizations are committed to increasing the deployment of wind power and addressing the challenges associated with its development.

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prakash Bank

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Santosh Shah’s favourite dishes
The recipes that Nepal’s MasterChef finalist took to the world

A

After finishing in second place in the 2020 edition of BBC’s MasterChef: The Professionals, London-based Nepali chef Santosh Shah became a household name in both the UK and Nepal. During the run-up to the finals, the 25-year-old chef presented before the judges a variety of dishes that are little-known outside Nepal. Born and raised in Kirtipur, Siraha District of Nepal’s southern plains, Santosh told up a hill to reach where he is today. After failing his school-leaving exams, he moved to India to work as a dishwasher at a five-star hotel. There, he rose through ranks to become a cook.

In an interview with Nepali Times, Santosh says he took a risk when he moved to London in 2010, but it paid off as he began working with renowned chefs. At the time he entered the MasterChef competition, he had been experimenting with Nepali food for two years in restaurants in the British capital. The judges appreciated the food items he prepared and presented, such as kodo (millet) pudding, amot (mango halwa), saag stuffed okra, yomari, chicken shail, and crab curry.

BIRIYA
Make hoy when there is sunshine. This is bow the Tamas and others in the southern plains of Nepal preserve the greens for future use. Called ‘biryai’, they wrap the willed greens, especially grass peas, mustard leaves and broad-leaved mustard, with black gram paste and dry it in the sun. It is cooked with potatoes during the mino season when the greens are scarce.

AIRKANCHAN
Collect soft taro leaves, wash them and put them in the sun for an hour. Spread the first layer of leaves and add rice flour paste, turmeric, a pinch of salt and some ayes, and then the next layer. Roll the leaves into a cylinder and cut small pieces out of it and fry them in mustard oil. Add onion, garlic, chilis, ginger, and garam masala with coriander leaves.

YOMARI AND BHAKKA
Yomari is prepared and eaten on Yomari Purni festival day by the Nova community in Kathmandu. Bhakka is a traditional snack popular with Tharu and Khojandi people from eastern Nepal.

POLEKO MAKAI
Roasted corn with coriander chutney.

JHOL MAMO
The origin of this dish goes back to the abode of old Kathmandu. One of the nameless streeties, constantly serving momo cooked on grilling kerosene stove, was the first to come up with the watery soupish achar on the side. They’re served at most high-end restaurants in Kathmandu.

Nepali Expat Arun Chaudhary tweeted:
Sky-presenting Nepali cuisine to the world, from the tubular papakam (foil) from the Tamas to yomari. Chef Santosh Shah from Kirtiya Village in Siraha has reached the finals. Best wishes, brother. Shree the name of Nepal like this only.

Chef Santosh Shah quoted with Global Voices on WhatsApp to know about Nepali food lovers and would like to promote. “Biryai is made of grass peas, mustard greens or broadleaf mustard leaves wrapped in black gram paste and dried in the sun. They are then sweet to be cooked in the rainy season when green vegetables are scarce.

Another dish Santosh would like to promote is Arachan, which is also popular in Tibetan, Bhutanese and other Indian states. Taro leaves, pasted together with rice flour or gram flour paste and cut into small cubes, are fried in mustard oil and then dipped in a curry of curd and spices—it’s hot, salty and sour!”

This story by Santosh Chaudhary originally appeared on Global Voices on March 19, 2021.
Nepal-Japan jobs deal still stuck

Nearly two years later, a win-win bilateral employment agreement has not taken off.

Upasana Khadka

On 21 December 2020, Prakash Parajuli was waiting at the Tribhuvan International Airport to board his flight to Japan. He had secured necessary paperwork for his job there as a caregiver, and was in high spirits at the prospect of starting anew despite the pandemic.

Parajuli is employed under the Japan Government’s Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) residence status. “This is a result of a lot of hard work and patience. For many months, I focused entirely on studying for the Japanese language test,” Parajuli told Nepal Times before he boarded his plane. After working in Qatar for two years as a cashier he is set to earn around Rs45,000, excluding overtime and bonuses. “I plan to work very hard and hope to stay long-term in Japan,” he says.

In March 2019, the governments of Nepal and Japan signed a memorandum of cooperation for the SSW residence program. The SSW category of the program allows workers to remain in Japan for a maximum of five years, with workers ensured equality of treatment as well as the ability to change employers within the same sector.

There is also a longer term SSW2 category that allows unlimited visa renewals and dependents. In the past five years, a total of 345,000 workers were to be hired from all SSW categories combined. In addition to the win-win situation that such labour programs afford, by helping 14 sectors address severe worker shortages in superaging Japan (see figure), it also allows Nepali youth to be gainfully employed at higher earnings in a service labor market. Nepal had more one reason to be jubilant—it was the second country to sign the agreement with Japan after the Philippines.

But little did we know that almost two years down the road, Parajuli would be just one of the handful of Nepalis who would benefit from this agreement despite the head start.

The agreement was a hybrid of the agreements that Nepal had with other countries; it was neither a purely government-to-government model like that with South Korea or Israel, nor did it allow recruiters to play a role in the agreements with Malaysia and select Gulf countries. It was signed under a government-to-business model, in which the Nepal Government proposed setting up a Japan Unit at the Department of Foreign Employment (DOFE) to oversee all aspects of the SSW implementation.

On the Japan side, the government played a more hands-off role and allowed the private sector to participate including employers, recruiters and support organizations. “This mixed modality is creating widespread confusion as there is a misconception that this is a government-to-government model, while it isn’t,” says Yaro Yoshitaka, Charge d’Affaires, Embassy of Japan in Nepal.

This government-to-business model envisioned a proactive government that would take on added responsibilities in lieu of the recruiters via the Japan Unit. It was an attempt to ensure that the fixed technical implementation experiences related to the past programs would not be further exacerbated in this model, forcing workers to pay hefty amounts to intermediaries.

The success of this hybrid model, however, rested on a proactive Japan Unit that minimized the private sector’s strength in marketing, matching, information sharing and employer engagement. The SSW program itself has had a rough ride. The number of countries that Japan has signed agreements with has increased over the last two years with the addition of Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and most recently, India. But the execution has been poor across the board.

While the SSW program covers 24 sectors facing worker shortages, so far, tests have been arranged only for the catering sector in Nepal. Tests in other sectors like the food industry and agriculture are scheduled for February and March. Japan-based Nepal has also been taking advantage of the tests administered in Japan to enable them to switch to SSW statuses.

In the last two fiscal years, 349 Nepalis have passed the technical examination for care workers whereas 207 have passed the language exam. “So, over 209 applicants are rights to work as caregivers in Japan and they will have to make the effort to find suitable employment opportunities,” says Yoshitaka from the Japan Embassy.

And therein lies the confusion, as the Japan Unit at Department of Foreign Employment (DOFE) is still not functional, whereas private sector intermediaries are barred from participating. Both employers and migrants are uncertain with the recruitment and employment system in the other country.

In 2019, the Nepal Embassy issued 7 visas for SSW although it is not clear how many among them passed the exams in Nepal versus Japan. More visas have been issued in 2020, but the data has not been made public yet.

While individual labour approaches are being tested by DOFE, which means a migrant can independently arrange his contract with the employer and would be provided the labor approval by DOFE, it is easier said than done. The employment system is complex to navigate from job search to obtaining the visa related paperwork, confusion related to language differences, distancing and unfamiliarity of contexts and practices prevalent.

Nepalis are already investing time, effort and money to prepare for the exams, with many, as seen in the case of over 200 successful test-takers, who are looking for guidance on being matched with employers in the caregiving sector.

Amit Tariyal and delays, a few language institutes like Universal and Felina have stepped in to intermediate and garnered recognition among separate for helping them connect to employers. They explain that they have facilitated the interviews with care centers in Japan free of cost to the migrants because but are being compensated by their Japan-based partners.

Data obtained by Universal Training Center from the Japan Foundation shows that, of the couple hundreds that have passed both exams, around 96 have gone further with the process and passed interviews, completed paperwork, and received their Certificate of Eligibility (COE), the last step required before they can apply for visas. But there are delays and uncertainty in obtaining visas due to the pandemic.

While confusion abounds and there is a growing need for a functional Japan Unit or another alternate to the wolrd situation, the lucky few Nepalis who manage to overcome the odds are thankful for the opportunity.

Bina Gurung, was one of the first and few SSW workers from Nepal who arrived in Japan in November 2020. “I am now in my training period but am getting paid my regular wages. Most of the Japanese I take care of are in their 80s and 90s, she said over the phone. Her husband, too, has been enrolled in a language course and is in the process of testing to see if he can join her. However, despite successfully completing his language and skills exams, Phamnhan, Bao, has failed the interview “I have taken the interview three times already,” says Bao. He worked in Molybdenum and graphite for nine years as a security guard and now runs a small shop in Nepal, brushing up on Japanese vocabulary, when he can. “I won’t stop reapplying because I have already invested an enormous amount of time and effort and passed the tests,” he says.
Nepal hopes for tourism rebound in 2021
A lot depends on vaccines, arrival quarantine rules, and ease of getting visas

The availability of Covid-19 vaccines, a recent decrease in safety rates in India and Nepal, and inquiries from travelers seeking to get out into the Himalayan wilderness, have raised hopes of a rebound in Nepal’s tourism industry in 2021.

However, travel trade insiders say the numbers will only pick up if Nepal’s tourism authorities are proactive about promoting Nepal as a safe destination, and if the bureaucratic rules for visas and quarantines are clarified and eased.

However, some of that optimism has been tempered by a new resurgence of the coronavirus in Europe and Southeast Asia, as well as sustained high levels of infection in the United States.

“We had a German group booked for an Annapurna Base Camp trek in February, but when they found out that they had to spend a week in quarantine in a hotel in Kathmandu, they cancelled,” said one trekking agency owner who has not had a single group for a year now.

Although few questions the need for quarantine, there is a feeling that with double PCR tests on arrival and after quarantine, the period can be reduced to four days.

Then there are the confusing rules about visas. Nepal has cancelled on-arrival visas, although in some cases tourists have been allowed in if their tour agent supplies proper documentation beforehand. The rules are neither clear, nor consistently applied.

Present rules stipulate that foreigners coming to Nepal have to get visas before they come, have a PCR test 72 hours before the flight, 85,000 insurance, a 7 day reservation at a designated hotel in Kathmandu, and a return ticket. Citizens of countries where there are no Nepal embassies have to send their passports to the closest capital with one.

However, where trekking agents with enough connections could organise the papers, some trekking and climbing groups have got visas on arrival.

“The rules have to be very clear, they should not be confusing, and they should be consistently applied,” said an international airline manager in Kathmandu. “Otherwise, it adds to the uncertainty of travelling in the time of corona, and people end up cancelling their trips.”

The travel trade is putting pressure on the Ministry of Tourism to allow visas on arrival to all foreigners as long as they have insurance and PCR negative reports, and to streamline the entry process before the spring trekking and climbing season to revive the industry. More than 1 million people used to be directly employed in the tourism industry, and double that number depended partly on income from the sector.

“I am not very optimistic about 2021, but I believe 2022 is going to explode,” says Remendra Bhamre, Managing Director of Nepal’s largest domestic airline Buddha Air, who expects arrivals by road and air to increase once India-Nepal travel is opened.

However, for attracting tourists from Europe and North America, he says Nepal has to publicize the fact that Nepal is a safe destination, and rebrand itself and proactively promote its unspoilt nature, and wilderness adventure for the post-pandemic era.

Buddha Air had started training its staff with safety drills and health protocols training for check-in and on board in July. After domestic flights resumed mid-September, Nepal’s airlines have been carrying even more passengers than pre-Covid on trunk routes because of reduced fares and the risks in long-distance bus travel.

Much of this surge is also due to the expansion in domestic tourism. Although arrivals figures are still lower than pre-Covid levels, destinations like Chitwan, Pokhara, Khumbu have picked up because of Nepal travelers.

Indeed, Dhurjaiy Regmi of Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) says domestic tourism has been able to partially compensate for the lost business in the hospitality industry that used to be dominated by international visitors.

“Domestic tourism sustained us during the time of crisis, now with the vaccines, we hope foreign tourists will start coming back from the spring season,” Regmi says.

However, airlines and hotel executives say that unless the visa process is made easier, and the restrictions relaxed, it is unlikely that the numbers will pick up till September at the earliest.

As regular international flights restarted in October, and trekking resumed, there has been some foreign trekkers trickling in, but most have been detered by safety concerns, as well as entry restrictions. Total tourists dropped from over 1.1 million in 2019 to fewer than 230,000 last year.

Tribhuvan International Airport saw a drop in number of passengers from 4.13 million in 2019 to only 1.63 million last year.
Western museums are under pressure to send back Kathmandu Valley’s stolen deities

Alisha Sijapati

On day in 1982, the residents of a Patan neighbourhood woke up in the morning to notice that the Laxmi-Narayan they had been worshiping, was missing from the shrine.

The rare, and notorious composite deity of the two deities had been in the temple in Patka Tole for 30 years, where it had been venerated by generations. Having lost all hopes of finding it, the community established a poor replica of Laxmi-Narayan and placed it in the shrine in 1993.

Six years after its theft, in 1999, the 15th-century statue, which is also known as Vasantapati-Kamala, surfaced briefly at Selly’s auction house based in New York. But it vanished again after that.

Two years ago, American artist Joy Lynn Davis, who had documented Kathmandu’s stolen deities through her unique paintings, was doing a Google search for lost idols from Nepal, when she came across a grainy image of the familiar Laxmi-Narayan that she had painted (see interview). Working from the image, the deity was traced to the Dallas Museum of Art to which it had been loaned for 30 years by private collector David T. Owsley.

American art crime professor Erin L. Thompson went on to write an elaborate piece on the stolen god last January in the portal. Hypothetically titled ‘Stolen Goddess Surface in a Dallas Museum’, this put not just the Laxmi-Narayan but other stolen Nepali deities in the International limelight.

Shal Raj Shrestha, a resident of Patka Tole is convinced that their god has been found and will soon be returned because of the evidence of provenance of the statue.

“The long wait

The 18th-century idol of Uma Maheswar in Gaith, Patan (left) pictured in a single frame's look at Dharmashala of Nepal which was stolen in the early 1960s.

More than 55 years after the Uma Maheswar was stolen, the community has preserved the last trace of a goddess seated in a Gaith idol, hoping for its eventual return.

The Gaith Uma Maheswar is presently an exhibit in the Denver Art Museum (right).”

Holy homecomings

American artist Joy Lynn Davis talks about her famous 2015 exhibition, ‘Remembering the Lost Sculptures of Kathmandu’ and her unique method of commemorating Nepal’s stolen idols through paintings. She spoke to Kanak Mani Dixit on the Jago Samaj tv magazine program. Excerpts:

Kanak Mani Dixit: You painted Patan’s stolen Laxmi-Narayan idol. Why that particular idol and another you ultimately locate it at the Dallas Art Museum?

Joy Lynn Davis: I painted the Laxmi-Narayan idol based on its replication in 2013 when I was living in Patan as an artist resident at Kathmandu Contemporary Art Center. At that time, we knew the idol had been stolen in 1984 and sold by Sotheby’s in New York in 1986. After that, no one knew its whereabouts. I did a Google image search, and found the blurry image of a Laxmi-Narayan and my heart just jumped. I knew immediately it was the same murti from Patan. The image was on a blog by a Nepali who didn’t know that the idol in the Dallas Museum was stolen. It was particularly extraordinary to have found the image online.

Where are we on the return of the Laxmi-Narayan statue to Nepal?

It’s been a great privilege to be able to collaborate with the FBI and share the information I had collected. The Dallas Museum was not immediately open to returning the murti and the FBI was able to make a very strong case against them. It has now been seized and will soon be returned to Nepal. The day it arrives in Nepal, I will be the happiest person—so many people and organizations have worked on this.

But if we put out information about the theft, wouldn’t museums and collectors hide the statues, making their return even more difficult?

I absolutely agree. There are many sculptures around the world from Nepal. They are now housed in museum storage facilities. It is unfortunate. We need to get the word out there that Nepal is ready to accept them back. It would be ideal if the museums worked on it voluntarily, and we could help facilitate that. We can make replicas for them, document
Lost and found

The original 12th century Laxmi Narayan was stolen from the Patan Museum in 1961. After searching for it, the idol appeared in a Swedish auction catalogue in 1996. Shri Bishnu Pokhara, the idol was later bought back from the Swedish auctioneer in 2015.

In 2018, there was an attempt to steal the idol from a temple in Nepal, but the theft was foiled by the police. The idol was later returned to its original temple.

The statue was again stolen from the temple in 2021, and the police are now on the lookout for the perpetrators.

The idol was then returned to its temple in 1995 and is now in the National Museum of Fine Arts, which also holds the original idol.

The statue of Lord Ganesha, a famous deity in Hinduism, was also stolen from the temple in 2018. The police are investigating the case.


details...


Himashi 2021
Himashi’s rural-urban intercultural exchange project will develop skills, knowledge and empower girls to promote health and wellness through traveling to diverse communities. Register for the Facebook live on Facebook.

Dining

Nandini Food Court
Nandini Food Court
They offer a wide variety of Continental cuisine. Try the signature ‘Naga Perna’ and ‘Samosa’ which are a must-try.

Jatra Cafe & Bar
It offers a wide array of Continental cuisine. Try the signature ‘Naga Perna’ and ‘Samosa’ which are a must-try.

Hermann Helmers
Hermann Helmers offers a wide array of cookies, bread, pastries and their most famous cakes. They have a bakery along with a mug of hot chocolate.

Plates Restaurant & Bar
Plates Restaurant & Bar
This restaurant is known for its local cuisine. Guests can enjoy a variety of local dishes, including their famous ‘Naga Perna’.

Events

Himashi 2021
Himashi’s rural-urban intercultural exchange project will develop skills, knowledge and empower girls to promote health and wellness through traveling to diverse communities. Register for the Facebook live on Facebook.

First-aid course
On Saturday, Adventure Center will conduct a one-day introductory course for outdoor enthusiasts. Visit the center’s Facebook page for more information.

The Latin Lovers
Beer and wine tasting at the Friday pub! Enjoy the Latin vibe! Come and enjoy.

The Moving Forum
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Himashi Katha
The web series shows various parts of ordinary people in the form of short documentaries. Catch her most recent video on her official YouTube channel.

Martin Chautari
Martin Chautari discusses sessions on topics ranging from feminism to parenting in Nepali. Sessions are available on the Martin Chautari Facebook page.

Dhyya
Dhyya is a visual art and lifestyle brand. Check out the work of 17 traditional artists online through the Dhyya Art website.

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Win a trip to India through the Dhyya Art website. The winners will be announced on Facebook.

Nepal Heritage Documentation Project website
The website provides virtual visits to Nepal’s monuments and heritage sites.

Air Quality Index

Kathmandu’s AQI index has been fluctuating between 300 and 400, indicating poor air quality. The air quality index is an indicator of the level of pollutants in the air and is used to predict health risks. It is calculated based on the concentration of specific pollutants in the air, such as fine particulate matter (PM2.5) and nitrogen dioxide (NO2).

Our Pick

Nepal Heritage Documentation Project
A series of virtual visits to Nepal’s monuments and heritage sites.

Himashi Katha
See her videos on YouTube.

Jatra Cafe & Bar
Visit Jatra Cafe & Bar for their signature dishes.

Nandini Food Court
Visit Nandini Food Court for their wide variety of Continental cuisine.

Hermann Helmers
Visit Hermann Helmers for their delicious bakery and hot chocolate.

Plates Restaurant & Bar
Visit Plates Restaurant & Bar for their diverse menu, including local dishes.

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Memories of home

Himalayan Light Foundation awardees Jagdish Moktan and Priyanka Singh Maharaj showcase their work at Siddhartha Art Gallery

Alisha Sijapati

After nearly a year of closures, Siddhartha Art Gallery is putting up two new shows. Jagdish Moktan’s The Way Home is Away from Home and Priyanka Singh Maharaj’s In the Realm of Recollections showcase art they worked on during the pandemic.

The artists received the Himalayan Light Art Scholarship Awards, a joint grant created by Chinese artist Zhao Jianqiu and Siddhartha Art Gallery’s Director, Sangita Thapa.

Although both Moktan and Maharaj have taken part in group shows at their university’s BFA exhibitions, Angkor Photo Festival, and Kedle Sikkim, they were very anxious about the reception they would receive in Nepal.

“When you work on your own, you have to be your own judge. But when the work gets an exhibition, the audience is all different,” Moktan said after the inauguration at Jhober Mahmud’s Kezaria.

There is an array of Moktan’s 138 frames of charcoal on paper on display at the Siddhartha Art Gallery. The series is called ‘Fragmented Clouds’, and depicts skies beamng in by densely packed buildings where the clouds are reflected on window panes.

“Siddhartha Art Gallery’s Director, Sangita Thapa, invited me to participate in this exhibition. I wanted to showcase my work here because it is a place that I feel comfortable with,” says Moktan.

In his works, he uses charcoal, pastel, and watercolor. The artist says that his works are inspired by the environment and the places he has visited.

“The way home is away from home and the way home is always a journey of self-discovery.”

While Moktan’s works focus on the ground floor showcase his hyperrealistic vision, the first floor of the gallery also carries the theme of ‘home’, but in a polar opposite level. Maharaj’s exhibit, In the Realm of Recollections, is grounded in nostalgia out of which she weaves patterns.

Maharaj creates art out of memory, scanning old family images, and transforming them on to fabrics. She picks a set of black and white images, and embroiders on them, the variations of different stitches amplifying her own experiences of those memories.

“I learned hand embroidery by watching my grandmother’s work. My father, who is working in Hong Kong, often sends pictures via Facebook. These pictures and my grandmother’s embroidery skills have always been close to my heart,” says Maharaj.

Her work transforms the ceiling into an imagination of images and colourful stitches that instantly embrace the visitor in the warmth, associated with the idea of home. She was studying charter accountant and increasingly unsure about her career path, when a friend suggested applying to Kathmandu University.

While the two exhibitions are juxtapositions in terms of expression, thematically, they converge in their sense of belonging. While Maharaj accumulates an abundance of family memories, Moktan pursues the idea of a distant home.

Himalayan Light Art Award tries to give space to emerging artists in Nepal with the potential to go big with an original personal style. Priyanka Gauri, Lakshmi Chadha, Man Gurung and Subhas Tamang are artists who have been recipients of the scholarship in the past.

“The Foundation’s Justin Zhao says, “Through this scholarship, we want the artists to hone their skills and help them organise exhibitions.”

Sangita Thapa of Siddhartha Art Gallery says that there were platforms like the Himalayan Light Scholarships when she was an aspiring artist herself.

“As an artist curator, my job is to see the potential in the artists and display their work. It is about promoting these budding artists and making them known to the viewers,” Thapa told Nepal Times.

She adds that Maharaj and Moktan’s works are representations of how the two artists worked through the lockdown, amidst the uncertainty of the pandemic. Being restricted at home for such a long period may have inspired them to create more versions of ‘home’.

The Way Home is Away from Home and In the Realm of Recollections

Siddhartha Art Gallery, Bakhtapur

10th February 2027
As we live through Covid days, self-care when anxiety strikes is important

We are living in unprecedented times and it can cause emotions such as frustration and irritability more easily than before. It is completely normal to feel anxiety at such times as we are learning to cope with stress, worry and fear of the unknown. We cannot help but wonder what could go wrong next.

Health measures such as social distancing, closing of establishments and wearing masks have made people feel isolated, lonely, and anxious—all these emotions add to more stress and anxiety.

As we continue to address the coronavirus pandemic, it is time to pay attention to the one that grows at a parallel—the mental health pandemic. It is vital to learn healthy coping methods to take care of oneself, and as a sense of responsibility to the community we live in. Right now, the concerns are higher than before. It is no longer, just about us but about everyone around us.

It is completely natural to experience feelings of worry and stress about one’s own health. It is valid to have fears regarding your financial situation or potential loss of employment due to businesses closing.

When you feel anxiety, it is normal to notice changes in your eating and sleeping patterns, having difficulty concentrating, and feeling of impatience to use more caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol.

When you experience such changes and urges, it is important to realize that your mental health needs attention. Like most things in life, anxiety is not one size fits all. Different people experience different signs and symptoms of anxiety. People react differently to stressful situations, and the same coping mechanisms and treatments will not work for everyone.

There are many factors that affect the level of stress and anxiety you feel during a pandemic, such as your emotional and physical health, emotional support from family and friends, and your financial situation, among others.

But because meditation worked for your cousin, it does not mean it will work for you the same way. You may have to try different methods, so you are able to find what works best for you. Till then, it is important for you to stay patient.

Be kind to yourself and remind yourself that it is completely normal to experience anxiety during a pandemic and that there are healthy ways available to tackle that anxiety.

Here are some ways you can take care of yourself and others during the pandemic:

- Take care of your family but also remember to take care of yourself.
- Establish and focus on meaningful connections with people.
- Continue to maintain social connections with family and friends despite social distancing via phone calls or video chats.
- Mindfulness and isolation can deeply affect one’s mental wellbeing.
- It is important to do your research and get your information from reliable sources. Do not believe everything you see and hear on social media, and only trust Covid-related information from certified medical professionals.
- Make sure to have the following information easily available.

- What do you need to do if you think you might be sick or infected.
- Given your health and access to medical facilities, go see a medical provider to get a PCR test or self-quarantine as needed.
- Know when and where you can get tested close to home, the average cost of tests and the amount of time taken to get the PCR results.

If you believe something won’t help you, it never will. But if you believe something can help you, you might just try it.
How transboundary haze affects Nepal

Indo-Gangetic pollution flows up Himalayan river valleys, to the mountains

Prabhakar Shrestha

The Himalayan mountains act as a barrier separating the clean air of the Tibetan Plateau from the polluted Indo-Gangetic plains. But Nepal’s rivers cut through the mountains, and their valleys allow smog from the plains to penetrate deep into the mountains.

This haze intrusion goes up to elevations of 4,000m, and the pollution layer is more shallow and flat in winter, and inclined and parallel to the ridgeline in the pre-monsoon. The depth of this pollution layer up the valleys also decreases with elevation.

These visible air pollution images are captured regularly by the MODIS Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer instrument aboard the two NASA satellites Terra and Aqua orbiting the earth. The dull, bluish haze is mostly made up of fine aerosol particles and extends right across the Indo-Gangetic plains from Pakistan to Bangladesh, as well as the Tarai in Nepal.

While human-generated emissions from agricultural burning, urban, rural and industrial emissions are mainly responsible for this region-wide pollution, weather conditions and the trapping effect of the Siwalik Range also affect its spread. More interestingly, if we zoom in on the images, we can see that the haze does not just stay in the plains, but flows up into the inner Himalayas along river valleys.

These satellite images provide valuable insight for researchers looking into the geographical spread and long-range transport of aerosol particles. Scientists at Duke University in the United States have developed a novel technique to use the high-resolution satellite images from MODIS and elevation data from SRTM (Shuttle Radar Topography Mission) to extract the dust plume base up to an elevation of 4,000m, and height over the Terai Valley in eastern Nepal.

The Arun River starts in Tibet, makes around Mt Everest to find a gap between Makalu and Kangchenjunga to tumble down Himalayan gorges to meet up with the Sun Kosi and Tamur—flowing out into the Terai at Chharka and then through the Kosi Barrage to meet the Ganges in India. This also opens up the entry gate for haze to flow from the Indo-Gangetic Plains into the inner Himalayas.

In winter, when the surface temperature in the plains plummeted, and the air is dry. The southern edge of the Tibetan Plateau is at lower levels is also battered by the sub-tropical jetstream, with weak westerly wind below it. The low surface temperature in the plains confines the pollution to a shallow boundary layer that is lower than the Siwalik Range. Valley winds along the river valleys then transport the haze into the inner Himalayas.

In general, the aerosol size distribution peaks around 100nm, which is usually the oldest, most processed background aerosol and about the size of the Covid-19 virus. Another smaller peak around 20 nm, is indicative of fresh but not necessarily local aerosols. The chemical composition of PM2.5 (particulate matter below 2.5 microns) is dominated by organic matter from burning of wood, crop residue, coal including vehicular emission, and others. The light absorption properties of elemental carbon play a crucial role in atmospheric warming and surface cooling due to their interaction with the daytime solar heating.

Aside from transboundary haze, this winter has also seen an increase in wildfires that have exacerbated the pollution in Nepal’s inner Himalayan valleys. The Pathivat and Antamapura Conservation Area faces in December, followed by uncontrolled wild fires in Manang, Lamjung and Baran in January were clearly visible in NASA satellite images.

The very high pollution levels in Kathmandu Valley on 6-7 January was also attributed to overcast skies which subdued the ventilation mechanism of the valley, but smoke from these wildfires also acted as contributors.

While local air pollution can be brought under control in the interest of protecting public health by the local governments with appropriate policy and regulations, it is trans-boundary pollution that cannot be easily addressed. More immediately, there is an urgent need to set up permanent air quality monitoring stations along Nepal’s major river valley outlets to monitor trans-boundary air pollution.

Prabhakar Shrestha is a research scientist working at Duke University, Germany.
Lost in translation

Nepal struggles to preserve its indigenous languages as those speaking them dwindle

Alisha Sijapati

At last count Nepal had 129 spoken languages, but even in few cases are identified, others are becoming extinct. At least 34 of the languages and dialects spoken in Nepal are endangered, and the next ones on the verge of disappearing are Dura, Kusunda, and Tilling, each of which have only one speaker left. If a language is spoken by less than 1,000 people, it is categorized as endangered.

"It will not surprise me if these three languages will be the next to go. With no one left to speak, we will not be able to save them," says Lok Babahur Lopchahan of the Language Commission of Nepal, which is entrusted with preserving Nepal's linguistic diversity.

Lopchahan predicts that over 37 more languages spoken in Nepal are likely to disappear in the next 10 years.

According to the Language Commission of Nepal's 2019 annual report, the languages most commonly spoken in the country are Nepali, Magar, Shimpi, Jumla, Tamang, Nepal Bhasa, Baigika, Magar, Dafai, and Urdu, in that order.

But just as these are languages disappearing, some that have never been recognized are being found in far flung parts of the country. Like Rana Tharu which is spoken in the western Terai, Narpu in a remote valley in Masang, Tam in the Terai Valley of Upper Gorkha, Nubri Lekh in the Manang region, and Puru and Synke.

It is fortunate that these languages have been identified, but it is unfortunate they are spoken by very few people, and could very soon die out," says Lopchahan, who adds that every two weeks, an indigenous language goes extinct somewhere in the world.

Even those that are among the top ten most spoken in Nepal are losing their first language status.

Parents insist on proficiency in Nepali or English in school to ensure good job prospects for their children. And even since King Mahendra's reign, the state has pushed Nepali as the lingua franca to the detriment of other national languages.

GCJ National, 23, is a voice actor and grew up speaking Newari at home. But from primary school onwards, it was Nepali and English only in class, and he soon forgot his mother tongue. Speaking Nepali with his family, it suddenly struck him how much of his culture he had lost with the language.

"The loss of Nepal's languages is the result of decisive state policy, our linguistic heritage was swept away to promote a national character," says GCJ.

King Mahendra instituted measures to create a unified Nepali identity through dress, language, and even dismantled democracy and insituted the partyless Punjabi system that he said "suited the Nepali soil."

Experts say that the decision enforcing the idea of nationalism through one language restricted indigenous communities to speak their ancestral tongues.

"The dominant class made its language the national language, and in doing so other languages suffered collateral damage," says Rajendra Dahal, Editor of Shikshak magazine.

"The end of a language is not just a loss for a community, but for the country and the world."

At the Language Commission of Nepal, there is a sense of urgency to save the three languages that each have only one speaker left. It has partnered with 45-year-old Kamal Kusunda, the only living person in the world who speaks Kusunda. She now runs a small private school in Dang to teach the language to over 20 students.

"If I die, then my mother language dies with me too. I had to revive this language for its value to our people, and the hope of keeping our ancestral language alive," Kamal Kusunda told Nepal Times over the phone.

Mahesh Ghimire of Language has a similar task. At the only remaining speaker of Dura, he is preparing to start a school to teach the language to others in the community. "We can’t let this language die," he says.

Other languages like Tam, more recently identified as distinct dialects, were already endangered by the time they were identified as being uniquely different.

"Older people in Tam Valley exclusively speak Tam, but the younger generation is losing the language," says Wengchuk Rapte Lamka, a fluent Tam speaker himself who is working to expand its use by

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Introducing the language to children through cultural activities.

Can kale-based linguistics anthropologist Mark Turin worked with the ‘Tiiti’ in Dolakha and Sindhpur to document their endangered language. “To speak of linguistics saving languages is just as ludicrous as suggesting that apps and digital technologies save language,” he says. “Neither is true, and both are dominated by quite colonial and extractivist models of knowledge production.”

He says speakers of indigenous languages like Tiiti deserves the recognition as they work tirelessly to reclaim, revive and revite their ancestral languages, often in the face of considerable opposition.

Indigenous youth in these communities are now creating domains of use for ancestral languages to thrive once again, in print, online and on air. “This is the true work of language revitalisation and reclamation, and it deserves wider recognition,” Turin adds.

After Nepal went into the federal mode, it was expected that schools across the country would teach regional languages. Article 31 of the Constitution says, “Every Nepali community living in Nepal shall have the right to acquire education in their mother tongue up to the secondary level, and the right to open and run schools and educational institutions as provided for by law.”

The Curriculum Development Centre along with rural municipalities introduced a ‘local curriculum’ bearing 100 points. For instance, Bhukarpae and Gokarna municipalities have curricula designed to teach students about their own municipalities. While some schools offer mother tongues as an option, a majority choose the local curriculum.

In October 2020, Kathmandu Mayor Bidya Bhandari Shukyana made it mandatory for schools to teach Nepali Blues from Grade 1-8. But there was resistance from parents, with many feeling it would burden the students and their Nepali and English would suffer.

“We have tried offering students formal classes on Nepali Blues for many years, but there was not much interest from guardians even though we know children thrive when they learn new languages,” says Jayti Man Sherchan, former Principal of Mahi International School, who introduced a Thakali language club in the school.

“Parents are more interested in their children being proficient in English or Mandarin. Change is only possible if the government intervenes and provides resources and training to teach our own mother tongues,” says Sherchan. However, there are limitations in residential schools where

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Nepal does not have the country’s linguistic heritage seems to be valued more. Sujit Shrestha was born in Kathmandu but moved to the US when he was in high school. Now a professor at the University of Maryland, Baltimore, he says his wife and children only speak English and Nawa, and no Nepali.

Nawa gives the kids an identity, and connects them to the extended family, especially their grandparents. It is about teaching our kids cultural sensitivity and open-mindedness towards other cultures and people.
Holy guacamole

All this knee-jerk criticism of Prime Minister K.P. Oli for offering prayers at Pashupati misses the whole point about his interpretation of dialectical materialism. This is the doctrine in which Marx (Karl, not Groucho) postulates a steady revolutionary progression from the primary stage of socialism through the dictatorship of the proletariat, on to full-bloomed Communism, and finally breaks the cycle of births and rebirths through the attainment of Nirvana.

Latin American followers must be red with (unocy that communes in Nepal) have given 'Liberation Theology' an entirely new meaning by cleverly combining Leninism, Stalinism, Marxism, Hinduism and Hinduism.

In fact, unknown to most of us, the entire Central Committee of the Nepali Communist Party was red on the outside and white inside all along. But The Almighty is in the hands of a dilemma. Which faction of the NCP should He side with: Oli, or Prachanda-Nepal? Which one will make Him party chair?

Having abolished the monarchy and banished the Shah god kings for good, it is logical for Prime Minister K.P. Oli, as protector of the realm, to also regard himself now as an omnipotent incarnation of Comrade Vidyasagar.

On the other hand, 2020 has a head start with a large collection of bronze statues in Kathmandu. Some of them are being installed on the buildings to show the similarities to the statues that he built with Siddhartha Gautam. He has also taken a new,occasion, to worship water buffalo on the holy banks of the Kast in Ghaiatara.

If this carries on, it may just be a question of time before Chairman Mao, inspiriting starts to also sacrifice said buffaloes, as well as black goats to appease the gods. For someone who conducted human sacrifice in the past, that shouldn’t be too much of a leap.

Chairman MDS, for his part, hosted a large Maoist gathering in 2018 at Sosviol during which he partook of sacrificial wine from none other than Hēi Ji Han with Unified Church comrades in attendance. This means Nepal (country, not comrade) has inducted new members to its celestial Politburo. In addition to the 23 million we already have.

Not to be outdone, Christian Mahabir Maharjan has himself blessed by members of the Evangelical Gospel Assembly Church so he could purify himself of his sins and perform a Second Coming.

Communists are atheists and thus are not supposed to believe in god, but there is nothing stopping an atheist from being God himself. But if the comrades really want to perform miracles and are serious about turning Nepal into Singapore in the next two years, they may need to fall back on the opiate of the masses.

Lucky for us, NCP followers are already named after gods: Mahesh Pokhrel
Vidhara Pandel
Vahana Sinpal
Bidy Devi Bhandari
Hum Devi Bhakta
Narayan Kali Shrestha
Shankar Pradul
Krishna R Maha
Ram S Thapa
Deep Gurung
Gauri Shankar Chandry

The Ass